

THE DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF A MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT  
PROGRAM AT JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, ALASKA

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## ABBREVIATIONS

JBER: Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson

MC-OD: Marriage Care-On Demand

USAF: United States Air Force

TDY: Temporary Duty

## ABSTRACT

Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson (JBER) is the largest military installation in Alaska with nearly 12,000 active duty Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines. Military members and their spouses at JBER not only endure the common stressors of marriage, but also the additional stressors of military life. The JBER Marriage Care program was created to help military members and their spouses strengthen and make lasting, positive changes in their marital relationship. The project author, a military chaplain, trained six JBER chaplains and three JBER chaplain assistants to provide marriage retreats and seminars. The intent of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the JBER Marriage Care program, including the MarriageCare retreats, the Marriage Care-On Demand seminars, and the training program for facilitators.



## *CHAPTER 1*

### MARRIAGE IN THE USAF AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE JBER MARRIAGE CARE PROGRAM

Building a successful marriage can be difficult for any couple, but it can be especially challenging for military personnel and their spouses. Military service often involves frequent moves, lack of extended family support, long work hours, long periods of separation in the form of temporary duty (TDY) trips and deployments, irregular work schedules, and a tendency to talk to spouses and children in abrupt and aggressive ways. These stressors can be trying on any marriage, but they can spell doom for marriages with low levels of commitment, support, communication and hope.

As an active duty chaplain in the United States Air Force (USAF) for 15 years, I have experienced these stressors in my own marriage. My wife, Emily, and I have been married 18 years. After much prayer and discussion, we consciously and deliberately chose to enter the military chaplaincy. I grew up in an Air Force family, so I understood a little of what military service would be like, but my wife had no exposure whatsoever to the military. We are now in our 15th year of service. We have moved ten times, never lived closer than 400 miles to our families, worked endless 70-80 hour work weeks, traveled to over 30 TDY locations, and endured a six-month deployment to an extremely dangerous and volatile combat zone in Afghanistan. In those times when Emily and I have had trouble connecting as a married couple, the stressors of military life have made things even more difficult.

Considering how difficult as it is to be married in the military, it should not be surprising that many service members and spouses choose to divorce. The military divorce rate has increased from 2.6 percent in 2001 to 3.4 percent in 2013 and is highest among female Air Force members.<sup>1</sup> According to the December 19, 2013 edition of *Military Times*, "About 7.2 percent of military women reported a divorce in fiscal 2013.... Among service branches, the highest divorce rate was seen among USAF enlisted members, at 4.3 percent."<sup>2</sup> In addition to lengthy separations and combat deployments, one obvious reason why the divorce rate is so high is that service members are more likely to get married at a younger age than their civilian counterparts.<sup>3</sup> In my experience couples tend to get married at a younger age for two reasons: First, many young military members are stationed far from home and yearning for the stability and comforts of home. They equate stability and comfort with family, and therefore want to start a family as soon as they can. Second, long-term dating is almost impossible in the military. Military members generally move every three to four years, sometimes every one or two years. The only way the military will intentionally assign two military members to the same base is if they are married. If the two military members want to stay in a dating relationship, they need to get married at least six to nine months before one of them is eligible for reassignment. Additionally, if a military member is dating a civilian, the only way the military will pay for the civilian to move with the military member to a new assignment is if they get married.

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1. Andrew Tilghman, "Military divorce rate ticks downward," *Military Times*, last modified December 19, 2013, accessed October 11, 2014, <http://www.militarytimes.com/article/20131219/NEWS/312190026/Military-divorce-rate-ticks-downward>.

2. Tilghman, "Military divorce rate ticks downward."

3. Benjamin R. Karney, David S. Loughran, and Michael S. Pollard, "Comparing Marital Status and Divorce Status in Civilian and Military Populations," *Journal of Family Issues* 33, no. 12 (2012): 1572.

Although some have argued that the military divorce rate is roughly that of the civilian population, accurate equivalent records do not exist.<sup>4</sup> Military members are more likely to get married and more likely to marry at a younger age than their civilian counterparts, so it is logical to conclude that the military has a higher percentage of divorces.

Marriages that end in divorce are costly, not only for the couple but for the government. The average couple can expect to pay about \$18,000 in legal fees and lost wages.<sup>5</sup> The cost to the government is much higher. Taxpayers foot the bill for the higher use of food stamps, public housing, education programs, and anti-poverty measures adding up to about \$30,000 per civilian divorce.<sup>6</sup> The cost to the government for a divorcing military couple can be even higher because of Early Return of Dependents, a program that requires the United States military to pay moving costs for dependents (a military spouse and children) following a divorce. According to [www.movingguru.com](http://www.movingguru.com), those expenses are often in excess of \$10,000 per person.

The effects of divorce on children have been well documented. Children of divorced parents tend to exhibit lower academic performance and self-esteem. They have higher levels of delinquency and increased risk of substance abuse, behavioral problems, and health issues.<sup>7</sup> After a divorce, a child's performance at school may be adversely affected by the custody arrangement.<sup>8</sup> The mobile life of the military may put an

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4. Karney, "Comparing Marital Status and Divorce Status in Civilian and Military Populations," 1572.

5. David G Schramm, "Individual And Social Costs Of Divorce In Utah," *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 21 (2006): 133.

6. Schramm, "Individual And Social Costs Of Divorce In Utah," 133.

7. Janet Shansky, "Negative Effects of Divorce on Child and Adolescent Psychological Adjustment," *Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 37 (2002): 73.

8. Shansky, "Negative Effects of Divorce on Child and Adolescent Psychological Adjustment," 73.

additional strain on the dependents of divorced couples. Sharing custody of military children after a divorce can be complicated by frequent moves and deployments.

Divorce also comes with a significant negative impact upon parents, particularly fathers.<sup>9</sup> Divorced parents experience "lower levels of happiness and self-esteem and greater psychological distress."<sup>10</sup> Divorced fathers are less likely to receive practical support (house work, errands), emotional support, face-to-face contact, phone contact and advice than divorced mothers.<sup>11</sup> Since 81% of the USAF is male, the negative effect of divorce is particularly significant for Air Force active duty, Reserve and Air National Guard forces.<sup>12</sup> This is compounded by the frequent moves characteristic of military life and the resulting geographical separation from their children. These factors combine to significantly inhibit a man's ability to be a good father.

Statistics indicate that divorce is a key factor in suicides among military personnel. A Pentagon study revealed that suicide rates in the military are highest among people divorced or separated, a rate of 19 per 100,000---24% higher than troops who are single and 55% higher than for those who are married.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear that marital quality has declined in the military over the past few years.<sup>14</sup> Reports of infidelity, trial separations and intents to divorce have increased.<sup>15</sup>

Much of this, of course, is a consequence of a widespread change in how readily divorce

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9. Matthijs Kalmijn, "Gender Differences in the Effects of Divorce, Widowhood and Remarriage on Intergenerational Support: Does Marriage Protect Fathers?" *Social Forces* 85, no. 3 (2007): 1081.

10. Daniel N. Hawkins, and Alan Booth, "Unhappily Ever After: Effects Of Long Term, Low-Quality Marriages On Well-Being." *Social Forces* 84, no. 1 (2005): 456.

11. Hawkins, "Unhappily Ever After," 456.

12. "Air Force Personnel Center - Air Force Personnel Demographics," Air Force Personnel Center - Air Force Personnel Demographics, accessed October 13, 2014, <http://www.afpc.af.mil/library/airforcepersonnel demographics.asp>.

13. Robert Burns, "2012 Military Suicides Hit a Record High of 349," *The Big Story*, last modified January 14, 2013, accessed October 13, 2014, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/2012-military-suicides-hit-record-high-349>.

14. Burns, "2012 Military Suicides Hit a Record High of 349."

15. Burns, "2012 Military Suicides Hit a Record High of 349."

is accepted in American society. Lyndon Reviere also blames the increase on the inherent stress that repeated military deployments can exert on a marital relationship.<sup>16</sup> In my experience, “deployment stress” is a great deal more than the stressors commonly associated with extended separations from family and loved ones. Battlefield stressors such as the fear of death, the loss of a warrior buddy, uncertainty about how long the deployment will last, sleep deprivation, and guilt feelings associated with inflicting death or injury on another human being, can also cause significant emotional damage to a military member and bring emotional turmoil to a marital relationship.

The problem of military divorce has garnered the attention of senior defense leaders. Commander Leslie Hull-Ryde, a spokesperson for the Department of Defense stated that the health and well-being of service members and their families is a top priority for the military, noting that strong relationships improve force readiness, a critical issue for today’s highly-deployed military.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, military commanders welcome programs that will strengthen marriages within their units.<sup>18</sup>

Studies have shown that being in a healthy marriage has significant benefits over being single or divorced, including higher satisfaction with life and greater economic resources.<sup>19</sup> However, staying in an unhappy marriage is not significantly better than being divorced.<sup>20</sup> In fact, individuals in unhappy marriages have the same low levels of satisfaction with life as divorced individuals. This level of satisfaction reduces self-

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16. Lyndon A. Riviere, et al, "2003–2009 Marital Functioning Trends Among U.S. Enlisted Soldiers Following Combat Deployments," *Military Medicine* 177, no. 10 (2012): 1169.

17. Amy Bushatz, "Military Divorce Rate Down Slightly in 2012," *Daily News*, last modified January 23, 2013, accessed October 13, 2014, <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2013/01/23/military-divorce-rate-down-slightly-in-2012.html>.

18. Bushatz, "Military Divorce Rate Down Slightly in 2012."

19. Linda J. Waite, and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

20. Hawkins, "Unhappily Ever After," 451.

esteem, creates psychological problems and negatively impacts health.<sup>21</sup> These data tell me that a program aimed at improving Air Force marriages must focus not only on reducing the divorce rate, but also on increasing the level of satisfaction within Air Force marriages.

In my years as an Air Force chaplain, I have personally witnessed the negative effects marriage problems and divorce can have on military members. I have walked on our nation's battlefields. I have traveled in war zones by helicopter and on Humvee convoys through IED-infested territories. In some of the most remote and unfriendly places on earth, I have spent hundreds of hours talking with uniformed men and women about their families and their marriages. I have counseled with battle-hardened warriors, known for their mental toughness and resiliency, and cried with them as they sobbed upon learning of their spouse's illicit affairs. On the home front, I have counseled countless couples through their marital issues. Some were wonderful successes that I remember with a smile. Others I remember with a tear. I have seen military careers completely derailed by marriage problems, to the point that the military member had to be discharged from the service with no pension or retirement benefits.

I have provided pastoral care and counseling for untold numbers of individuals following a divorce. I've sat with fathers as they lamented a lost relationship with their children and with mothers as they expressed frustration over their children no longer having a father figure in the home. In 2005 I taught "Children in the Middle" classes for the state of Texas at Fort Hood, the world's largest Army installation. There I prayed with and counseled parents who were struggling with how to help their children cope with

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21. Hawkins, "Unhappily Ever After," 451.

their parents' divorce.<sup>22</sup> It was at once a wonderful ministry opportunity and a dauntless, painful task.

A chaplain is a pastor in uniform, specially trained to survive and minister in a combat zone. Although references to military ministry can be found throughout ancient literature, the modern chaplaincy is commonly traced to Saint Martin of Tours, a 4<sup>th</sup> century French soldier.<sup>23</sup> It is said that Martin encountered a shivering beggar on a winter day. Overcome by compassion, he cut his cape in two with his sword and gave half of it to the beggar. That night, Martin dreamed that the beggar was Christ. He devoted his life to Christian ministry, and his half of the cape became a sacred relic taken into battle by French kings. The "keeper of the cape" was the *Chapelain*, from which comes the title, chaplain. The title, "*Man of the cloth*" also comes from this story.<sup>24</sup>

George Washington is primarily responsible for the presence of chaplains in America's military. Washington had witnessed the positive impact of chaplain ministry during the French and Indian Wars, and he wanted chaplains for the Continental Army. Washington asked that chaplains be paid (\$20 a month, plus food for their horse) and suggested they be non-combatants.<sup>25</sup>

As a chaplain with broad experience and personal observation of the negative impact of divorce in the Air Force, I have a passion for strengthening military marriages

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22. "Between Two Homes® LLC," Children in the Middle, accessed October 13, 2014, <http://www.childreninthemiddle.com/>.

23. The Bible, for instance, is filled with references to military ministry. Melchizedek ministered to Abraham and his troops following a battle to rescue Abraham's nephew, Lot (Genesis 14:18-20); Elijah ministered to Naaman, a Syrian general (II Kings 5:1-19); John the Baptist ministered to the soldiers who came to him with questions (Luke 3:14); Jesus ministered to several Roman centurions (Matthew 8:5-13 *et.al.*); Peter ministered to Cornelius and his military unit (Acts 10:1-43); and Paul ministered to the Praetorian Guard (Philippians 1:13).

24. Michael G. Maness, "Etymology of 'Chaplain': Forms, Early English Use, Origin," accessed October 13, 2014, [http://www.preciousheart.net/chaplaincy/Meaning\\_Chaplain.htm](http://www.preciousheart.net/chaplaincy/Meaning_Chaplain.htm).

25. Maness, "Etymology of 'Chaplain': Forms, Early English Use, Origin."

and helping couples avoid the pitfalls of divorce. Although I am in the Air Force, my passion for marriages first led me to obtain a certification as a Family Life Chaplain from the Army Family Life Center, followed by a Master's Degree in Marriage and Family Christian Counseling from the University of Mary Harden–Baylor. At Mary Harden–Baylor, I learned theoretically and theologically sound techniques for supporting and strengthening military marriages. I also learned how to provide effective marriage counseling for military couples, and I began evaluating the various marriage improvement programs offered by the Army and the Navy, hoping to find one I could feel confident using in my ministry to Air Force personnel.

The Army offers a program called Strong Bonds. I was trained in the Strong Bonds program in 2010 and certified as a Strong Bonds instructor. I like the fact that the Strong Bonds program gives Army chaplains the option of choosing from ten different approaches for strengthening marriages. I also like the Army's commitment to qualify all their chaplains to lead Strong Bonds programs. Strong Bonds, however, will not work for the Air Force. The programs are not specifically geared toward military members and cannot be adapted by facilitators because of the contract the Army signed with the program owners. Additionally, none of the Strong Bonds curricula is faith-based without being distinctively Christian (as required by the Air Force Chief of Chaplains), and they are too expensive in light of the recent decreases in military funding for marriage programs.

I also studied the Navy program, Credo. I was gratified to learn that Credo does not spend Chaplain Corps money hiring outside organizations to provide marriage curriculums to Navy chaplains, but I was disappointed that Credo does not have a



standardized marriage enhancement curriculum. Each of the Navy's 22 Credo chaplains develops his or her own curriculum, or borrows curriculum from other Credo chaplains. Moreover, the Credo model places Navy chaplains at 11 locations and has them lead all Navy marriage retreats. That model would not work for the Air Force because Air Force installations are widely dispersed throughout America, Europe, Asia and the Pacific.

In 2008, in response to the growing number of marriage problems in the Air Force, the Air Force Chief of Chaplains invited eight chaplains with degrees in marriage and family therapy to Washington, DC, to create a marriage enrichment program for the Air Force Chaplain Corps. Because I was known throughout the Air Force for my passion in helping married couples strengthen their marriages, I was chosen to be one of those eight chaplains.

The Chief of Chaplains outlined five specific guidelines for the marriage program:

1. It was to be faith-based, but not exclusively Christian. Healthy spirituality is an essential aspect of a healthy marriage.<sup>26</sup>
2. Because the program was to be paid for with Appropriated Funds (tax money), it needed to be open to all military members.<sup>27</sup>

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26. Mark Thompson, "Semper fi: The effect of marriage enrichment on military marriages: A causal study," (D-Min diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013).

27. Military chaplains are pastors to their own faith group (in my case, Christian), but they are chaplains to everyone. Picture a death notification, for instance. If I am asked to deliver a death notification to a Jewish or Muslim family, I can approach their front door with Christ in my heart, but principles of kindness and civility dictate that I should temporarily set my Christian vocabulary aside. Death notifications are not a time for evangelism. As their chaplain, I want to speak warm and encouraging words from my heart to theirs. If it is appropriate, I can urge them to use their religious faith as a source of personal spiritual resiliency. I do not consider this an abridgment of my free speech or free exercise of religion rights. Should the Jewish, Muslim, or Atheist family ask me about my Christian faith, I would gladly share my faith with them and even invite them to follow Christ. The key is to be kind and pastoral in a religiously-sensitive situation.

3. It must specifically address the unique needs of military members. The Chief of Chaplains wanted to make sure the program dealt with real issues with which military people daily struggle.
4. It must be free of charge. The Chief of Chaplains did not mind spending money on food or lodging at a retreat, but he did not want to pay for published materials. The Chaplain Corps should be able to produce its own materials.
5. He wanted a unified theme. Attendees at a marriage enrichment program should be able to easily catch the “big idea” presented at each session.<sup>28</sup>

The group of marriage and family therapy-trained chaplains decided to design a marriage retreat based on the four main parts of the traditional marriage vows: "I take thee -- to have and to hold -- for better or for worse -- to love and to cherish." Based on their belief that 50-70% of change within a marriage happens outside of counseling sessions, they decided to focus on presenting guidance and an opportunity for making positive changes outside the sessions. They also wanted to design a program that all chaplains could lead without needing to be an “expert” in marriage and family. Consequently, rather than bringing in experts to teach the couples, they wanted the couples themselves to decide what changes were needed in their marriages, and they wanted them to actually implement those changes during the retreat weekend. In other words, they wanted each couple to be valued and respected for what they themselves brought to the session.

One month later, Chaplain, Colonel Jerry Pitts, Chaplain, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Grubbs, and I met to begin writing the retreat program. For two years we edited,

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28. Ch, Maj Gen, William Baldwin, Air Force Chief of Chaplains, Conversation with author, Washington D.C., December 5, 2008.

polished, coordinated, and tested the retreat program before launching it Air Force-wide in 2010. From 2010 to 2015, the retreat, now named MarriageCare, was attended by over 15,000 Air Force personnel and their spouses. An astounding nearly 99% of attendees have reported that their marriages were strengthened through the retreat! According to pre-test and post-test evaluations, marriage satisfaction increased an average of 30% per couple!<sup>29</sup>

In late 2012, the Air Force (and the entire United States military) entered a period of severe financial constraint. Despite the marriage program's phenomenal success, the future of MarriageCare retreats was in jeopardy. Various chaplains tried presenting all four MarriageCare retreat sessions in a one-day seminar format, but with very little success. Three seminars offered in three different locations (the United Kingdom; Columbia, South Carolina; and Anchorage, Alaska) reported that 80% of attendees said their marriages were strengthened through the seminar, with an average increase in marital satisfaction of only 10%, significantly lower than had been experienced using the retreat format. These disappointing results may have been because there was so little quality couple time over the seminar weekends or because the sessions did not allow time to apply the information to the couple's lives, or both.

I am convinced the Air Force and the Air Force Chaplain Corps need a comprehensive marriage enrichment program, not just a single event. I also believe that the Chaplain Corps needs a less-expensive alternative to the retreat format.

In light of the continued decrease in funding for military marriage retreats, how can military chapels develop a marriage enrichment program that is uniquely faith-based,

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29. Data available through the USAF Chaplain Corps. Percent increase was calculated using 100% as the maximum possible increase where every couple reports a 10. In this way, all events could be compared regardless of their pre-event evaluation number.

cost-effective, and inclusive of all military members and spouses? I propose the development and launch of a comprehensive, faith-based marriage enrichment ministry on a primarily Air Force installation. The ministry program would include MarriageCare retreats (even with decreased funding a military installation should be able to afford at least one or two marriage retreats a year) and a MarriageCare seminar called Marriage Care-On Demand.

The primary goal of the Marriage Care-On Demand seminar will be to help spouses strengthen their marriages and make lasting, positive changes. The seminar will be divided into four sections that can be accomplished in one day or in four separate days. Seminars can be offered as stand alone one- or two-hour events. Military commanders will be offered an opportunity to choose the kind and format of seminars they prefer, based on the needs of the unit and the time and resources the unit has available. The seminars will be evaluated utilizing a post-seminar survey. Per USAF Chaplain Corps guidance, the individual surveys will be held in strictest confidence, but I will be able to provide general, overall results to the base leadership for their use in assessing the marital health of their unit personnel. My goal is to offer at least four full Marriage Care-On Demand seminars and two MarriageCare retreats in a one-year timeframe. All retreats and full-day seminars will be evaluated with the same post-event survey. As with MarriageCare retreats, the seminar will be faith-based (but not exclusively Christian), relevant to military members, free, and built around the traditional marriage vows.

In consultation with a professional educator (PhD), I will ensure that each session engages kinesthetic, auditory and visual learners. Each session will include:

- A video learning tool for visual learners,
- Eye-to-eye conversation for auditory learners,
- Movement and activities for kinesthetic learners, and
- Comedic videos to keep everyone engaged.

My experience tells me that positive change in a marriage does not come as a result of knowledge alone. People can be told what to do to improve their marriages, but consciously or unconsciously they often decide not to do it. Therefore, the sessions will be geared toward specific action steps, not just knowledge alone. At the completion of each session, I will ask couples to vow to do something different rather than simply absorb new information.

The program will include marriage-counseling training for the chaplains at the test location, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) in Anchorage, Alaska. In light of the fact that 46% of the counseling Air Force chaplains provide to military members is marriage counseling, improving chaplain marriage counseling skills should help improve the marriages on JBER.<sup>30</sup>

I believe a comprehensive military marriage-education program on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson will help increase marital satisfaction for over 95% of people who attend the events. I will evaluate the success of the program through post-retreat and post-seminar surveys as well as post-counseling training surveys. I will create the seminar and the marriage training materials and utilize the MarriageCare retreat I helped to write in 2008. I will train USAF chaplains to facilitate the seminars, and I will have a chaplain colleague distribute the surveys and correlate the results. I will have a different chaplain

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30. Air Force Form 1270, 2009-2012, unpublished.

administer the survey and correlate the results for the chaplains I will train. That chaplain will ensure confidentiality for the chaplains who participate in the survey.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

An in-depth look at the biblical view of marriage enrichment is outside the framework and focus of this paper. Rather, I will focus my theological discourse on specific verses and religious topics addressed in the MarriageCare retreat and Marriage Care-On Demand seminar. It will include a review of a theology of change, generational blessings and curses, the concept of commitment as presented in Ruth 1:16-17, and biblical support for reframing as a counseling technique.

#### **A Theology of Change**

My goal for a marriage enrichment event, whether a retreat or a seminar, is for marriages to change for the better. A theory of change in marriages will be discussed in chapter three. In this chapter we will briefly discuss a theology of change from a biblical perspective.

The Bible repeatedly talks about God changing us and making us new. Examples include the following:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”<sup>1</sup>

“And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”<sup>2</sup>

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who

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1. 2 Corinthians 5:17, New International Version.

2. Ezekiel 11:19-20.

loved me and gave himself for me.”<sup>3</sup>

God is the ultimate change agent in people’s lives and marriages. In a Christian marriage retreat, change is sought through submission to God’s plan for the marriage and through heart-to-heart discourse between a husband and wife. In a military setting, however, it is not always possible to focus on following God and His will for marriage within a marriage retreat. Although I am the co-author of the MarriageCare Retreats and the principal author (supported by a small team of Chaplains) of the Marriage Care-On Demand seminars, the seminars are sponsored by the United States government and funded primarily by appropriated funds (tax dollars). Consequently, the retreats and seminars must be targeted to (and appropriate for) all military members regardless of religious belief or lack of belief. Couples are given an opportunity to talk about their faith and consider how their faith or lack of faith may affect their marriage, but the chaplain leader must not present a specific theological view of marriage. To do so would imply Government endorsement of that view. There are no limitations, however, on private discussions between the chaplain and the couple, nor are there restrictions on presenting the Christian view when responding to a question. In a multi-faith or secular setting, it would be wise for the chaplain to preface his/her remarks with something like, “I am not speaking as a representative of the United States government. This is my personal viewpoint as a Christian clergyperson.”

Change also occurs as individuals and couples grow in what I call marriage wisdom. I want couples to gain marriage wisdom when they participate in a marriage retreat or a seminar and apply that wisdom to their lives and marriages. Change does not come to a marriage simply through acquiring knowledge. My marriage retreats and

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3. Galatians 2:20.



seminars focus on gaining marriage wisdom and putting it into action by making and maintaining positive change in the marital relationship.

When I was a child my favorite cartoon was *GI Joe*. Every episode of *GI Joe* contained a public service announcement. For instance, a group of children would be doing something unsafe, like crossing the road without looking both ways. GI Joe would teach the children a safer action. The kids would always reply, "Thanks, Joe. Now I know." GI Joe would answer, "Knowing is half the battle."

Most marriage retreats and seminars take the approach that knowing is all the battle. They assume that if attendees will only accept expert advice or gain general knowledge about marriage, then the attendees' marriages will improve. The danger with this approach is gaining knowledge without gaining wisdom. Knowing may be half the battle, as GI Joe says, but putting that knowledge into action (marriage wisdom) is the other half.

Just because a person knows what is right does not necessarily mean he or she will do what is right. Charles Stanley, a noted author, pastor, and Christian leader, agrees: "Wisdom" he notes, "is knowing and doing what is right.... a lot of people, even Christians, are willing to be satisfied with gaining lots and lots of biblical knowledge--and many people go to Bible studies and don't realize it isn't enough to know what's right, it's applying the information and the knowledge that you have."<sup>4</sup>

Pastor Stanley's point about applying information and knowledge is critically important. I took my first marriage counseling course in my second year of seminary. I had been married four months at the time, and I was eager to learn all I could about

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4. Craig Von Buseck, "Dr. Charles Stanley: Learning to Walk Wisely," *The Christian Broadcasting Network*, accessed August 1, 2015, <http://www1.cbn.com/biblestudy/dr.-charles-stanley/%3A-learning-to-walk-wisely>.

Christian marriage. I took copious notes as the professor expounded upon how to build and maintain a thriving, “divorce proof” marriage. I enjoyed the class so much that I signed up for another marriage counseling class with the same professor. As I walked into his classroom the following semester, I was shocked to learn that the professor had divorced his wife and resigned from the seminary faculty! I don’t hold any animosity or distain towards the professor. On the contrary, I feel sorry for him. He knew the truth and taught the truth to others, but he was unable (or unwilling) to apply the truth of God’s Word to his own life and marriage. It is a classical example of values conflict—believing one thing yet doing another.

Through the years I have counseled and prayed with hundreds of newlyweds. For the most part, the couples entered marriage with their eyes wide open. They read the right books, attended seminars, and even took pre-marriage counseling from their pastor or chaplain. They felt totally prepared to enter the “blissful state of matrimony.” But after a few months, they hit the solid wall of reality and discovered that marriage is more than a good feeling accompanied by good intentions; marriage requires hard work and an unwavering commitment to the other person’s highest good. In almost every case, these well-intentioned young people knew what they needed to do to have a healthy marriage, but they failed to actually take the simple daily steps necessary to maintain their loving relationship. Though they were Christians, they had forgotten the biblical Golden Rule, a rule that applies to all of life, including marriage: “**Do** (emphasis mine) unto others as you would have them do unto you.”<sup>5</sup>

My wife and I are both professional counselors. We know a lot about what it takes to maintain a healthy relationship. Yet we repeatedly find ourselves forgetting or ignoring

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5. Matthew 7:12.

the simple things we need to do each day to keep our own marriage strong. Just knowing how to maintain a healthy marriage is not enough; we must consciously put our knowledge into action. Marriage wisdom is the proper application of marriage knowledge. It is knowing and doing what is right.

### **Generational Blessings and Curses**

The Holy Scriptures teach that we reap what we sow.<sup>6</sup> By the way we live our lives and interact with others, by our accepting or rejecting the ways of the Lord, we sow spiritual seeds that will bring forth a harvest and positively or negatively affect those around us. The biblical concept of generational blessings and curses tells us that others, especially our family members, can also reap what we sow. What we do today will affect our loved ones tomorrow; what we have received from others, we can consciously or unconsciously transmit to the next generation. When this is considered in the context of generation-to-generation blessings and curses, it leads to the counseling theory of intergenerational transmission.

The theory of intergenerational transmission asserts that behaviors, tendencies and attitudes are often learned behaviors that can be intentionally or unintentionally passed down over generations and have a positive or negative effect from one generation to another. These can manifest as simple behavioral ticks such as rocking while a person gives a speech, or as patterns of behaviors such as learned violence or hate. They are most commonly “caught” through the modeling of behaviors, rather than “taught”

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6. Galatians 6:7.

through direct communication.<sup>7</sup> These learned behaviors can eventually be adopted by an entire culture as part of its identifying feature.

Studies have found that parental divorce, for instance, increases the likelihood that adult children will experience separation or divorce.<sup>8</sup> The same is true for anger and violence, depression, alcoholism, and a host of other social issues. As a case in point, my father is descended from a long line of alcoholics, including his father, both his grandfathers, and all his uncles. Sociologists and social scientists would tag my father as a likely alcoholic in adulthood. But at age 20, in a little church in San Angelo, Texas, my father knelt at a Christian altar and gave his life to Christ. Through that simple act, the chain of sin, the curse of alcoholism that had been transmitted from generation to generation, was broken for him, his children, and his grandchildren.<sup>9</sup>

Since children commonly follow the positive or negative examples of their parents, Session One of both the MarriageCare Retreat and the Marriage Care-On Demand Seminar focuses on helping couples break negative intergenerational transmissions. Intergenerational transmission as a theoretical counseling model will be explained in more detail in the next chapter.

In Deuteronomy 27:11-26, Moses commanded six of the tribes of Israel to stand on Mount Gerizim and bless the people. At the same time, he commanded the other six tribes to stand on Mount Ebal and curse the people. Moses, the lawgiver of Israel, then presented 12 reasons for which a person would be cursed: dishonoring father or mother;

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7. Intergenerational Transmission, "Cultural Transmission: Values, Norms and Beliefs, Social Support, intergenerational solidarity, limitation," last updated 2015, accessed June 1, 2015, <http://family.jrank.org/pages/917/Intergenerational-Transmission.html>.

8. Marilyn Elias, "Cycle of Divorce is Abating," *USA Today*, last modified August 11, 1999, accessed June 1, 2015, <http://lists101.his.com/pipermail/smartmarriages/1999-August/002266.html>.

9. Encyclopedia.com, "Intergenerational Transmission," *Encyclopedia.com*, last updated 2003, accessed June 1, 2015, [http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Intergenerational\\_transmission.aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Intergenerational_transmission.aspx).

cheating a neighbor; tricking a handicapped person; cheating an alien, orphan or widow; having sexual relations with man's father's wife; bestiality; incest; sex with a man's mother-in-law; murder; and disobeying the law of God.

It is likely, according to Peter Craigie, that the blessing given to the people "would have been the exact reverse of the twelve curses that are stated."<sup>10</sup> These blessings and curses were not hypothetical; they were not arbitrary or based on a divine whim. The promises of blessing and the warnings about potential curses were a solemn pronouncement about what would eventuate from the peoples' positive or negative actions. The "blessings and curses" speech by Moses constitutes a divine principle that a society that welcomes cheating, trickery, bestiality, murder, etc. into its culture will experience the negative consequences that accompany those sinful actions. By accepting and embracing those evils, individuals and groups of individuals invite curses upon themselves. The opposite is also true: By following God's laws, individuals and societies invite God's favor (blessings).

Deuteronomy 28:1–6 continues the theme of blessings and curses:

And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.<sup>11</sup>

Here Moses again draws a direct correlation between acting rightly (keeping God's commandments) and receiving God's blessing. The conditional syntax of the

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10. Peter Craigie, "The Blessings," in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 331.

11. Deuteronomy 28:1–6.

sentence strongly emphasizes that blessings will “overtake” those who obey the voice of the Lord and do all His commandments.

At the end of Session One of both the retreat and the seminar, facilitators reframe intergenerational transmission in terms of blessings and curses. This provides a spiritual connection and context for the concept. It also aids couples in recognizing negative intergenerational transmission (without being prescriptive of the facilitator’s morality), and empowers them to break curses and convey blessings to their children and to others who learn from their example.

When a father (or either parent) lives a sinful life, his children are likely to continue in the same lifestyle. The Second of the Ten Commandments, recorded in Exodus 20:5-8 and again in Deuteronomy 5:8-9, warns that children will choose to repeat the sins of their fathers:

You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.<sup>12</sup>

This passage, and others like it,<sup>13</sup> refers to more than mere learned behavior. It is spiritual bondage, a negative pattern handed down from generation to generation.

In Deuteronomy 30:19, Moses cries out, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live."<sup>14</sup> The question naturally arises, if blessings or curses are a result of obedience or disobedience to God, why are the

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12. Exodus 20:5-8.

13. Numbers 14:18; Exodus 34:7; Lamentations 5:7; Deuteronomy 27-31; John 9:1-3.

14. Deuteronomy 30:19.

offspring involved? Why should a child be cursed because of the wrong actions of a parent?

A few years ago a young Air Force airman came to me describing the sins of his father. He concluded by saying, "I feel cursed because of who my father is and the bad things he has done. It doesn't matter how much I try to do good things. God is going to punish me for what my father did." The airman had adopted a philosophy of fatalism, one not at all consistent with the idea of generation-to-generation blessings and curses found in the Bible.

Because of well-known Bible verses like, "God is Love,"<sup>15</sup> and "We love him because He first loved us,"<sup>16</sup> God's promise of abundant blessings to those who love and obey Him is an easy concept to understand and accept. However, "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me" is much more difficult. It implies a curse on innocent individuals who are not guilty of the original sinful actions. Does this mean that the young airman who came to see me for counseling was correct in saying that no matter how good he tried to be, God would still punish him for the sins of his father? Are children hopelessly destined to live out curses placed on their parents? Are they to live without hope of redemption?

Deuteronomy 24:16 emphatically declares that the airman was not correct: "Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin."<sup>17</sup> Biblical scholars have pointed out that if people turn to God in repentance, generational curses will be averted or

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15. I John 4:8.

16. I John 4:19.

17. Deuteronomy 24:16.

nullified. Bob DeWaay, in his commentary on generational curses, quotes John Calvin, the 16th century theologian and pastor:

When God declares that He will cast back the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of the children, He does not mean that He will take vengeance on poor wretches who have never deserved anything of the sort; but that He is at liberty to punish the crimes of the fathers upon their children and descendants, with the proviso that they too may be justly punished, as being imitators of their fathers.<sup>18</sup>

Walter Kaiser, the distinguished Old Testament Evangelical scholar, also places the responsibility squarely on the sinful parent: “Children who repeat the sins of their fathers evidence it in personally hating God.”<sup>19</sup> Kaiser references hate not as an emotion but as a state of being. Their actions are contrary to God’s Will and therefore communicate a hatred of God and his law. Why would the children hate God? They have learned from their fathers to hate God, and they have adopted their fathers’ sinful acts as their own. Consequently, they will be held accountable for repeating the sins of their fathers in their own lives.

Jeremiah 32:18-19 sheds more light on this subject, suggesting that the phrase, “visiting the iniquities of the fathers on the children” applies only to children who continue the sinful ways of their father: “You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the parents’ sins into the laps of their children after them. Great and mighty God, whose name is the Lord Almighty, great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to the ways of all mankind; you reward each person according to their conduct and as their deeds deserve.”<sup>20</sup>

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18. Bob Dewaay, "Generational Curses: Biblical Answers to Questions Raised by the phrase visit the iniquities to the third and fourth generation," *Critical Issues Commentary*, last updated January/February 2002, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue68.htm>.

19. Walter Kaiser, “Commentary on Exodus” in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 423.

20. Jeremiah 32:18-19.



In these verses Jeremiah couples blessings and curses with individual responsibility. When God promises to punish the children of an evil father in Exodus or “give to everyone according to his ways” in Jeremiah, He is saying that each person has been given the freedom to follow the example of his or her parents – or reject that example.<sup>21</sup> As with the prophecy, “Cursed be Canaan,” which Noah uttered following Ham’s sin,<sup>22</sup> this passage addresses generational transmission and predicts a negative future for the descendants of those who turn their hearts from God. It does not, however, hopelessly condemn children for the sins of their parents.

Further support for the idea of individual accountability comes in Ezekiel 18. The people lodged a complaint against God based on their misinterpretation of Exodus 20:5. They believed it was unfair that they were being punished because their ancestors had sinned. Ezekiel responded,

Yet you ask, ‘Why does the son not share the guilt of his father?’ Since the son has done what is just and right and has been careful to keep all my decrees, he will surely live. The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.<sup>23</sup>

Proverbs 22:6 states, “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”<sup>24</sup> This is a perfect example of the principle that pointing a child in the right path or direction will have a positive affect on them later in life. It will be a blessing to the child. It is reasonable to assume that the opposite is also true. If a parent starts a child off in a direction he or she should not go, that child will be less likely to follow a good path throughout life. The wrong path will, in essence, become

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21. See also 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:11-14; Galatians 6:4-8.

22. Genesis 9:25.

23. Ezekiel 18:19-20.

24. Proverbs 22:6.

a curse. God's law clearly emphasizes each individual's responsibility to act in morally appropriate ways in accordance with God's revealed truth.

A blessing is the exact opposite of a curse. God has established boundaries, specific laws to govern our lives on this earth. We can ignore His laws and suffer the negative ramifications, or we can choose to accept His laws and be blessed. It is a matter of choice. This is seen in Deuteronomy 11:26-28 where Moses presents the people of Israel with two clear choices: "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known."<sup>25</sup> If we follow God's decrees and seek His will, we will pass along a blessing to our children – even if what was modeled for us in our childhood amounted to a curse. In one of the most historically significant and far-reaching blessings ever given and received, God promised to bless Abraham's descendants and make them "...as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand on the seashore."<sup>26</sup> In Galatians 3:8-9, the Apostle Paul argues that this blessing of Abraham and his heirs is the basis of the gospel.

Jesus Christ Himself is the greatest of all blessings. Once a person receives new life in Christ, the sins of that person's ancestors will no longer bring curses (that is, will no longer be a primary influence that drives behavior). Ezekiel 18:30 assures us that God does not punish children for their parents' sins. God clearly says, "I will judge you, each one according to his ways."<sup>27</sup> Jeremiah 31:29-30 says it even more emphatically: "In those days people will no longer say, 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the

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25. Deuteronomy 11:26-28.

26. Genesis 22:17.

27. Ezekiel 18:30.

children's teeth are set on edge.' Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge."<sup>28</sup> The curses handed down as a result of an ancestor's sin are automatically atoned for on the cross. The Bible says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?....Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns?"<sup>29</sup> Through the blood of Jesus Christ, God has redeemed us from the curse of the law and delivered us from the power of darkness.

It is important that we recognize the consequences of sin and how they ultimately bring poverty, sickness, destruction, death and, worst of all, eternal separation from God. Nonetheless, the Bible says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."<sup>30</sup> The "cure" for intergenerational transmission of sin, therefore, is repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'"<sup>31</sup>

In the Sermon on the Mount,<sup>32</sup> Jesus extends to his hearers the same two choices Moses presented in the Book of Deuteronomy. Either they could choose to obey God and reap the rewards of a righteous life, or they could refuse to obey him and reap the negative consequences. As Moses did in Deuteronomy 27, Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with blessings.<sup>33</sup> He then warns against ignoring or perverting God's Word.<sup>34</sup> The Five Antitheses ("You have heard it said...but I say unto you...") call believers back to

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28. Jeremiah 31:29-30.

29. Romans 8:31, 33-34.

30. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

31. Galatians 3:13.

32. Matthew 5-7.

33. Matthew 5:1-12.

34. Matthew 17-20.

the true meaning of the Hebrew law.<sup>35</sup> In Chapters 6 and 7, Jesus talks about putting faith into action through giving, prayer, forgiving others, and trusting in God. Interspersed with promises of reward (blessings) are warnings (“do not judge,” “do not give dogs what is sacred,” “not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom,” etc.). Both Jesus’ Sermon and Moses’ challenge offer practical guidance on how to live a godly life in a fallen world.

As the only truly Christian response to blessings received through faith in Christ, followers of Jesus Christ are instructed to bless others in return:

“But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”<sup>36</sup>

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”<sup>37</sup>

“We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it.”<sup>38</sup>

“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.”<sup>39</sup>

“May the LORD cause you to flourish, both you and your children.”<sup>40</sup>

### **Commitment in Ruth 1:16-17**

At the end of Session One of the one-day seminar, the facilitator reads Ruth 1:16-17 and introduces the idea of a vow of commitment. Over the next three sessions, the facilitator will repeatedly refer to the vow, explaining the historical and biblical context behind Ruth’s beautiful vow in Ruth 1:16-17. At the conclusion of the seminar,

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35. Matthew 5:21-48.

36. Matthew 5:44.

37. Romans 12:14.

38. 1 Corinthians 4:12.

39. 1 Peter 3:9.

40. Psalm 115:14.

participants will be asked to write their own vows of commitment based on the model found in the Book of Ruth.

The Book of Ruth focuses on the protective care and goodness of God. It tells the story of young woman named Ruth, a Moabite who came to know and trust the Lord. She lived in Bethlehem with her elderly mother-in-law, Naomi. Because both Ruth and Naomi were widowed, Ruth had to go to work in the fields, hoping to find enough grain that she and Naomi could live. She didn't know where to go, she didn't know what to do, she had no idea what the future held for her and Naomi. The Bible says that Ruth just "happened" to go to a field belonging to Boaz.<sup>41</sup> The rest of the beautiful little book tells of how God brought Ruth and Boaz together and made them husband and wife. As a person reads the story, it becomes abundantly clear that Ruth didn't just "happen" to go to Boaz' field. It was not an accident; it was not luck. It was the hand of God working in their lives. In fact, Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David and an ancestor of the Lord Jesus.

Despite the fact that the passage has nothing to do with marriage, Ruth 1:16-17 is a favorite Scripture reading at Jewish and Christian weddings:

But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me."<sup>42</sup>

It is a daughter-in-law's commitment to her mother-in-law. Naomi had obviously made a profound impression on Ruth, not only in her character, but in her faith. Ruth was determined to go where Naomi went and live where she lived. More important,

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41. Ruth 2:3.

42. Ruth 1:16-17.

something about Naomi's faith had profoundly impacted Ruth to the point that she declared, "your God (will be) my God."<sup>43</sup> Those words illustrate what it means for a person to turn from the world and place their trust in the Lord.

Although Ruth's words to Naomi are easy to understand, they are difficult to fathom. They are passionate, powerful, and profound. Ruth is determined to leave the land of her birth and move to a foreign country; she swears an oath that not even death will separate her from her mother-in-law; and most radical of all, she forsakes the religion of her childhood and entrusts her future to the God of Israel. In his commentary on the Book of Ruth, Matthew Henry records this statement about Ruth's commitment: "Nothing could be said more fine, more brave, than this. She seems to have had another spirit, and another speech, now that her sister had gone, and it is an instance of the grace of God inclining the soul to the resolute choice of the better part."<sup>44</sup>

By reading and explaining Ruth's vow and encouraging couples to write their own vows based on Ruth's model, MarriageCare facilitators encourage couples to make vows of commitment and trust to their spouse. The concept is similar to the biblical directive that a man, "will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife."<sup>45</sup> Moreover, by referencing Ruth's vow, MarriageCare facilitators introduce the religious aspect of the vow without being prescriptive of a certain religion or exclusive of any religious beliefs.

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43. Ruth 1:16.

44. Matthew Henry, "Ruth, Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible (Complete)," *Bible Study Tools*, accessed March 18, 2011, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/ruth/>.

45. Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:31.

### **Reframing as a Counseling Technique**

In the second session of the MarriageCare retreat, couples are taught how to reframe personality traits. The concept of reframing means to look at a situation, idea or person in a different way, through a different lens or frame. A Christian example of reframing is found in the Apostle Paul's guidance to the Church at Colossae, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."<sup>46</sup> Further, Paul tells the Ephesians that they were "seated with (Christ) in the heavenly realms."<sup>47</sup> The word "seated" is in the present tense. That is, it is not that Christians will someday be seated in the heavenly realms, but that we are presently seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. It is our daily experience as Christians. According to Paul, instead of encouraging one another to keep looking up, we should be challenging one another to keep looking down from the perspective of heaven. Paul reframes the Christian's understanding of his or her existence by changing the overall perspective.

In this fallen world there are endless occasions for despair. Despite it all, we can reframe seemingly negative situations and try to look at them from God's perspective. From God's perspective, no circumstance is hopeless. From God's perspective, there is never a reason to panic. When we consider our situation from God's perspective, there is always reason for hope.

When reframing is used as a counseling technique, the counselor (pastor, chaplain) tries to get the counselee to think about things differently or see a new point of view. Paul told the Philippians not just to avoid evil thoughts, but to turn things around and intentionally think about good things. He instructed them to reframe their situation by

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46. Colossians 3:2.

47. Ephesians 2:6.

looking at it from a completely different vantage point: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”<sup>48</sup> This same godly advice is found in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”<sup>49</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:5 adds, “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”<sup>50</sup>

Psalm 34 is a good example of reframing, especially when viewed in its historical context. The inscription immediately preceding verse 1 of Psalm 34 focuses on an incident that occurred before the psalm was written. In a sense, the psalmist is saying, “If you do not know the circumstances surrounding the writing of this psalm, you will not fully understand the psalm.” The inscription reads, “A psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed.”

The inscription refers to an incident recorded in I Samuel 21:10-15. David had become separated from his army and was captured by his enemy, the King of Gath, who intended to kill him. There was no opportunity to escape, no chance of rescue. So David did something idiotic and, at the same time, brilliant. In those days it was considered bad luck to kill an insane person, so David acted insane. The Bible says that he whooped and hollered and foamed at the mouth until saliva covered his beard. He clawed at the doors and went totally berserk. The King of Gath looked at him and said, “That man is an idiot! I’m not going to kill him!”

Consider how David felt as he watched the king and his entourage ride away that day. Here he was, the great King David, the legendary hero, the one people wrote songs

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48. Philippians 4:8.

49. Romans 12:2.

50. 2 Corinthians 10:5.



about. Now, when a two-bit king threatens his life, David acts like a complete idiot! We can only imagine how embarrassed and deeply disappointed he was in himself.

Following this incident, David, the poet of Israel, the man after God's own heart, took up his pen and composed Psalm 34. You would think the psalm would be filled with grief, frustration, despair, and expressions of embarrassment. But that's not at all what David wrote. Under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, David reframed the situation and turned it into something positive. He sang, "I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. I will glory in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together."<sup>51</sup> What a wonderful example of reframing! If we really believe that God is working in our lives for good<sup>52</sup> and that He is always in control, then we cannot help but look at our circumstances differently. God is never the cause of a bad situation, but He is the Master at taking a bad situation and making something good come from it.

Another biblical example of reframing is found in "the Epistle of Joy," the Book of Philippians. In issuing a command to the church at Philippi to rejoice, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that joy is a choice.<sup>53</sup> It is something we can choose to do. That is the whole point of Philippians, chapter 4. It is not just a matter of positive thinking; it is a matter of Christ-like thinking. The apostle summed it up perfectly in just ten words: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."<sup>54</sup> If people want to, they can develop an attitude of faith and joy that will serve as an inspiration to everyone they

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51. Psalm 34:1-3.

52. Romans 8:28.

53. Philippians 4:4.

54. Philippians 4:13.

meet. It is a matter of reframing each negative situation in light of eternity, realizing that God has our lives in His hands.

Other biblical examples of reframing include, “When I am weak, then I am strong,”<sup>55</sup> “We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope,”<sup>56</sup> and “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven....”<sup>57</sup>

In Session 2 of MarriageCare, couples are taught to reframe by focusing on the positive rather than the negative aspects of their spouse’s personality traits. Personality traits for the purpose of the MarriageCare retreat are defined as those aspects of one’s personality that are fairly permanent and are generally not negative or positive. The facilitator separates personality traits from habits or decisions through examples. The facilitator will say something like,

Personality traits are part of who you are; they make you unique. For example, you may be organized or free spirited, introverted or extroverted, serious or humorous, playful, disciplined, or adventurous. These are parts of your personality that are unlikely to change unless you face a life-changing event. Habits and decisions, like getting drunk, flirting, or leaving your underwear in the middle of the bedroom floor are not personality traits.<sup>58</sup>

When they first get married, people tend to focus on their spouse’s positive personality traits. They romanticize the individual and can only see the positive. After a few weeks or months, however, the spouse’s negative personality traits gain greater clarity. When a marriage partner falls into the habit of focusing on the negative traits of

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55. 2 Corinthians 12:10.

56. Romans 5:3-4.

57. Matthew 5:11-12.

58. Excerpt from MarriageCare retreat training. Property of the United States Air Force Chaplain Corps.

his/her spouse, it is difficult to be in the healthy and constructive frame of mind that is necessary when discussing issues that inevitably arise in every marriage.

When facilitators first started teaching MarriageCare, they noticed that most non-Christian participants did not have a problem with choosing to focus on the positive aspects of their spouse's personality. Christians, however, had great difficulty. Christians felt that by focusing on the positive and ignoring the negative they were giving tacit approval for the "bad" habit or sin of their marriage partner. Facilitators learned to quote Philippians 4:8<sup>59</sup> at the end of Session 2 while offering little explanation of the verse. This helped Christians recognize the biblical support for the concept of reframing.

### **Conclusion**

Religious attendees need to know their spiritual lives will be incorporated into their marital growth. Even though the JBER Marriage Care program is not specifically religious, it incorporates spiritual themes and religious verses in order to resonate with the chaplain presenters and religious attendees. At the same time, the JBER Marriage Care program must not alienate non-religious attendees so that all military spouses will be able to develop more healthy marriages.

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59. "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITURATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

As stated in the Chapter Two, I am convinced that positive and lasting change in a marriage is a spiritual process that involves more than merely changing one's thoughts and behaviors. Spiritual change involves a change of heart – a change in a person's conscious and unconscious beliefs about self, spouse, and God. For a Christian, spiritual change means saying yes to the Holy Spirit's work in his or her life.<sup>1</sup> When a person changes behaviors or beliefs but lacks a corresponding spiritual change in the heart, the result is usually nothing more than an emotional Band-Aid, a panacea that seldom, if ever, results in lifelong positive change.

Changing a heart can be a long, difficult and painful process. Marriage enrichment programs (counseling, mentoring programs, seminars or retreats) can help couples begin the process, but it is up to the individual couple to actually build upon the guidance and advice they hear and learn in a retreat or seminar. According to Eve Lipchik, "Therapists can't change clients, clients can only change themselves."<sup>2</sup> The goal of the Marriage Care program is to help couples begin the journey toward a true change of the heart. Simply acquiring knowledge is not enough; the goal is lasting change.

The Marriage Care program at JBER consists of the MarriageCare retreat and the Marriage Care—On Demand (MC-OD) seminar. It is a spiritual program heavily

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1. Nancy DeMoss, "Transformation: How Does It Happen? Challenges: The Life," *TheLife.Com*, last modified 2015, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://thelife.com/challenges/transformation-how-does-it-happen>.

2. Eve Lipchik, *Beyond Technique In Solution-Focused Therapy: Working with Emotions and the Therapeutic Relationship* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2002), 14.

influenced by the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, yet it is open and inviting to everyone, including non-believers. Four Jewish chaplains and two Islamic chaplains have been trained in the MarriageCare retreat and fully embrace the program. Even Atheists and Agnostics have praised and endorsed it. The reason for this broad acceptance, in my opinion, is the relational growth theory of change behind the Marriage Care program and the inherent respect for people of all faiths. That is what makes the program unique. The Marriage Care theory of change as related to relational growth permeates many of the relationship building activities of the JBER Chapel community, including single Soldier and Airman retreats and communication classes in conjunction with Family Advocacy.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, we will examine the Marriage Care theory of change as related to relational growth. We will also examine individual counseling theories that have informed the content of Marriage Care. Most important, we will consider the process of the JBER Marriage Care program itself. As this writer has repeatedly reminded the more than 250 facilitators he has trained, the thing that makes the MarriageCare retreat and MC-OD seminar unique is the process, not the content.

### **Theory of change: Why MarriageCare and Marriage Care–On Demand?**

Each marriage is unique and each client is unique.<sup>4</sup> Couples have different life experiences, different parents and grandparents, different roles and expectations, different personalities, different communication patterns, and different lives. Marital issues can vary greatly between couples; consequently, the areas couples need to address and change are varied as well. They may be dealing with issues involving communication,

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3. The Department of Defense Family Advocacy Program works to prevent domestic abuse and ensure the safety of domestic abuse victims.

4. Lipchik, *Beyond Technique*, 14.

commitment, sex, money, parenting, religion, conflict-resolution, extended family, forgiveness, family rules, personality differences, or an endless list of other things. According to Eve Lipchik, “Human beings are unique in their genetic heritage and social development. Their capacity to change is determined by these factors and their interactions with others.... Change occurs through language when recognition of exceptions and existing and potential strengths create new actions.”<sup>5</sup> Just as each couple’s marriage issues are unique, so also a couple’s capacity for change and the resources they can call upon to make changes a reality are unique.

Change can be scary. Lipchik states, “The main reasons clients do not want to be in therapy are because they do not feel the need for it or because they are afraid of it.”<sup>6</sup> A common fear in marriage counseling is the fear of revealing hidden issues that the couple considers insurmountable. Many married couples are afraid that openly discussing their issues will do more harm than ignoring them. Consequently, no matter how difficult things get, they avoid counseling or marriage enrichment programs, fearing that things could get worse.<sup>7</sup> Some get so accustomed to having marriage problems that they cannot imagine life without the problems. Even if they get help and try to make changes in their marriage, they will often revert back to the actions and feelings they had before seeking help.<sup>8</sup>

Change in a marriage can begin with the anticipation of a potentially helpful event. Whether a couple decides to attend marriage counseling, a retreat, a seminar, or

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5. Lipchik, *Beyond Technique*, 14.

6. Lipchik, *Beyond Technique*, 161.

7. Thomas Smith, “Why You Should NOT Be Afraid Of Couples Therapy,” *Counseling By Carissa*, last modified 2014, accessed November 11, 2015, <http://www.counselingbycarissa.com/why-you-should-not-be-afraid-of-couples-therapy>.

8. Thomas M. Smith, “Homeostasis,” last modified 2015, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://www.drtonmcares.com/homeostasis.html>.

simply speak with a couple they respect, the anticipation of getting positive results from the encounter will build hope. That hope, rooted in good and useful thoughts of an event the couple is about to attend or something the couple is going to learn, will often start them on a journey toward positive change.<sup>9</sup> "Experts who study behavior change agree that long-lasting change is most likely when it is self-motivated and rooted in positive thinking."<sup>10</sup>

When we advertise events included in the JBER Marriage Care program, we specifically design the advertising to elicit hope in active duty Air Force husbands. Although there is no intent to exclude or alienate wives, the brochures, the advertising, and even the activities and videos used in the program are geared toward men. This is because 80.9% of the United States Air Force is male.<sup>11</sup> The vast majority of these active duty men are married to non-military spouses.<sup>12</sup> No matter how extensively the chaplains and chaplain assistants on JBER advertise a Marriage Care program to military members, unless the men inform their wives about the program, very few couples will attend. The advertisements for the program and what previous attendees say about the program must appeal to active duty military men. Effective advertising and marketing of the Marriage Care program will motivate men to attend. Elevating their level of positive thinking about the benefits of an improved marriage will set the stage for long-lasting change.<sup>13</sup>

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9. Victor M Aziz, "Hope In Relationships: Learning From Everett L. Worthington Jr, Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling," *Old Age Psychiatrist* 59, last modified 2014, accessed November 11, 2015, <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/hope%20in%20relationships-RCPsych%20newsletter%20April%202014.pdf>.

10. "Why It's Hard To Change Unhealthy Behavior — And Why You Should Keep Trying," *Harvard Health*, last modified 2015, accessed November 11, 2015, <http://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/why-its-hard-to-change-unhealthy-behavior>.

11. "Air Force Personnel Demographics," *Air Force Personnel Center*, last modified 2015, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://www.afpc.af.mil/library/airforcepersonnel demographics.asp>.

12. Air Force Personnel Center, "Air Force Personnel Demographics."

13. Harvard Health, "Why It's Hard To Change Unhealthy Behavior."

Marriage Care Program advertising makes its appeal to men is by focusing on the location, the low cost, and the benefit to the military member. Retreat brochures do not have pictures of loving couples embracing; instead, they have pictures of the resort location nestled high in the mountains. The retreats and seminars are free to all military members and spouses. That fact is prominently displayed on the brochures. Because Marriage Care-On Demand events are held at an on-base location, the brochure emphasizes the free lunch and the opportunity to get off work for the day or afternoon.

Most men will be much more likely to trust the opinions of their friends or coworkers over any advertisement they see. For that reason, Marriage Care programs focus on maximizing the engagement and enjoyment of men while striving for the highest possible level of positive change in the marriage. Every session begins with a humorous video from a male's perspective, one considered non-offensive by most women. Of the over 7,000 women who have attended a MarriageCare retreat or MC-OD seminar, only one has complained that the videos were from a man's perspective.

Facilitators are encouraged to use humor in their presentations. They're also asked to avoid making themselves the hero of any illustration they use. And because men are commonly reluctant to express their feelings, no mention is ever made of the word "feeling" until Session 3. By Session 3, the men in the group are already invested in the program and usually willing to talk about feelings.

Unfortunately, building hope within a couple will not in itself create lasting change. "Even when we're strongly motivated, adopting a new, healthy habit — or



breaking an old, bad one can be terribly difficult."<sup>14</sup> Some couples with marriage problems developed a habit of devaluing their spouse or treating them in an unloving, disrespectful or generally unhealthy way. Marriage enrichment programs encourage and equip couples to break these negative patterns of interaction and create healthier, more positive habits and marital skills.

Although some marital skills are universal, the way they are applied in a marriage can be as unique as the marriage itself. Standardized psychoeducational approaches, including separating people into broad categories or teaching a set of marital skills that may or may not be related to a particular couple's marriage needs, have been proven effective.<sup>15, 16</sup> PAIRS, PREP and similar standardized psychoeducational programs have been shown to improve marriages.<sup>17</sup> However, marriage counseling based on an individual couple's goals and desires for their marriage has also been proven effective. According to Cynthia Franklin, "A meta-analysis of 163 randomized clinical trials concludes that the positive results found demonstrate that marital and family therapies work."<sup>18</sup>

It is true that marriage enrichment seminars and retreats need to include general information that has been proven beneficial for all marriages (skills- or psychoeducationally-based), but they also need to provide opportunities for couples to tailor information and techniques to their individual marriages (therapy based). Just as a

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14. Erika Andersen, "3 Things You Can Do To Change People's Behavior," *Forbes.com*, last modified 2015, accessed November 11, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/erikaandersen/2012/08/17/3-things-you-can-do-to-change-peoples-behavior>.

15. Lynn Turner and Lori H. Gordon, "PAIRS (Practical Application Of Intimate Relationship Skills)," *Journal of Couples Therapy* 5, no. 1-2 (1995): 37-53.

16. "What Is PREP?" *Prepinc.com*, last modified 2015, accessed November 14, 2015, <https://www.prepinc.com/Content/ABOUT-US/What-Is-PREP.htm>.

17. Programs can be obtained at <http://www.pairs.com> and <https://www.prepinc.com>

18. Cynthia Franklin, 'Theories And Methods Of Family Intervention,' *Utexas.Edu*, last modified 2015, accessed November 14, 2015, <https://www.utexas.edu/courses/franklin/62670/Week1.html>.

counselor would not provide counseling solely based on an established playbook, so also a retreat or seminar facilitator should not lean too heavily on broad, generalized teaching categories that cannot possibly be applicable to every situation. The counselor needs to have a plan in a marriage counseling session, but that plan must be adaptable based on the couple's responses, needs, and goals. Eve Lipchik believes that, "The imparting of information is probably a larger part of what most MFT's (Marital and Family Therapists) do that is commonly recognized."<sup>19</sup> A good marriage counselor goes beyond imparting information and helps the couple apply the information to their own situation. It is the same with marriage enrichment programs. Facilitators can be given guidelines for what to say, but the real work has to happen between the two members of the couple as they adapt and apply the information learned and the interventions experienced to their own marriage. They need to learn some solid "takeaways," but they also need to talk about issues specific to them. If all they do is learn from the "expert," then the facilitator has cheated them of an important opportunity to make positive changes in their marriage. Couples must be made aware of the goals and focus of a marriage enrichment program just as they would be informed of the goals and focus of marriage counseling.

Though allowing a couple to determine for themselves the focus and scope of counseling may seem to be a relatively new approach in marriage counseling, it is actually a well-established practice. In 1956, Maurice J. Karpf wrote, "This, however, may be said with a fair degree of certainty: those plans are best which emanate from the counselee under helpful guidance and suitable stimulation."<sup>20</sup> Research clearly indicates that psychoeducational programs are effective in improving marriages, but research also

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19. Lipchik, *Beyond Technique*, 141.

20. Maurice J. Karpf, "Some Guiding Principles in Marriage Counseling," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 10, no. 4 (January 1956): 222.

shows that interactive forms of counseling that value all clients as unique are also effective. The goal of MarriageCare and MC-OD is to combine both approaches to provide the best possible marriage enrichment for military couples. According to James E. Mudd,

Whitney Clark-Stager (1999) recently reported on an integration of solution-focused therapy, behavior marital therapy, and integrative behavioral couples therapy. Her findings were based on an individual case study from which she concluded, "that the combining of the theories is very beneficial in building on the inherent strengths of each model (p. 45)." She highlights the benefits of combining models so that the strengths of one model can compensate for the weaknesses of the other. One issue she addresses is the fact that solution-focused therapy ignores the fact that some couples may lack the communication skills necessary to reach their own goals.<sup>21</sup>

In the Marriage Care Program, facilitators provide information about couple communication and teach some basic skills. The facilitators spend more time, however, helping couples discover truths about each other and figuring out ways, with the facilitator's help, to improve their marriages in their own unique way.

The process of change within the Marriage Care Program goes beyond instilling hope in couples and utilizing a combination of psychoeducational and therapeutic interventions. According to Harvard Women's Health Watch,

There are several models of behavior change, but the one most widely applied and tested in health settings is the transtheoretical model (TTM). First developed in the 1980s by alcoholism researchers James O. Prochaska and Carlo C. DiClemente, TTM presumes that at any given time, a person is in one of five stages of change: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, or maintenance.<sup>22</sup>

Instilling hope of a positive outcome in the military member and spouse through advertising a retreat or seminar could help them move from the precontemplation phase

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21. James Mudd, "Solution-Focused Therapy And Communication Skills Training: An Integrated Approach To Couples Therapy" (Master's thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2000), 3-4.

22. Harvard Health, "Why It's Hard To Change Unhealthy Behavior."

into the contemplation or even preparation phase. It is in the contemplation phase that participants will make the phone call or send the email to sign-up for a Marriage Care program event.

In the preparation phase, couples “create a realistic action plan with achievable goals.”<sup>23</sup> In the action phase, the couple actually makes the change and begins to experience life with the new behavior.<sup>24</sup> Passing through the preparation and action stages involves more than simply learning new information. Couples must think through issues and adopt new behaviors and attitudes. They must then be afforded an opportunity to experiment with their new behaviors and attitudes. This cannot be accomplished in a seminar or conference room alone. Experiments with a new behavior or attitude must be accompanied by a conscious and very deliberate attempt to reduce outside distractions. That is why MarriageCare retreats are comprised of only four one-hour sessions in a weekend. That is also why couples attending MarriageCare retreats are generally not allowed to bring children. If they were to have their children with them, they would most likely not have an undistracted opportunity to practice their new chosen attitudes and behaviors. It would also limit the critically important interpersonal discussions that can lead to developing new attitudes and behaviors.

MarriageCare retreat sessions are designed to help couples make the most of their “couple time.” They are given adequate time to discuss issues and decide what behaviors and attitudes they want to change, but they generally do not have enough time to talk about everything they want to discuss. As my father often said when he was teaching me to preach, “Stop preaching even when the congregation wants you to go five minutes

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23. Harvard Health, “Why It’s Hard To Change Unhealthy Behavior.”

24. Harvard Health, “Why It’s Hard To Change Unhealthy Behavior.”

longer. Always stop speaking before they stop listening. That way they will talk about the sermon after they leave the church.” The “couple time” outside of the sessions helps couples move into the action stage by giving them an opportunity to talk about issues they did not have time to discuss in the session.

Even the shorter MC-OD seminars allot as much time as possible for couples to practice and adjust to new behaviors and attitudes. This time multiplies when MC-OD sessions are separated by days, weeks or even months. The limiting factor is that the longer the wait between sessions, the less likely couples will be able to build on previous sessions.

It is widely accepted that, “Change is constant and inevitable; a small change can lead to bigger changes.”<sup>25</sup> According to Harvard Women’s Health Watch, “Studies have also shown that goals are easier to reach if they’re specific (‘I’ll walk 20 minutes a day,’ rather than ‘I’ll get more exercise’) and not too numerous.”<sup>26</sup> What is true for physical fitness goals is also true for marital goals. In each Marriage Care program session, the goal is to help the couple make one, or at the most two, changes in their marriage. The sessions use multiple approaches (which will be discussed later in this chapter) to help couples personalize and solidify those changes both in the session and after the session.

The process used to facilitate change in Marriage Care programs is based on a three-pronged concept of 30% large group advising, 30% small group normalizing, and 40% spouses personalizing.<sup>27</sup> Each session of MarriageCare and MC-OD contains lessons, illustrations and support that provide marital advice. Additionally, each session

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25. Lipchik, *Beyond Technique*, 20.

26. Harvard Health, “Why It’s Hard To Change Unhealthy Behavior.”

27. Steven Richardson, “Air Force Chaplain Corps – MarriageCare,” *Chaplaincorps.af.mil*, last modified 2015, accessed November 11, 2015, <http://www.chaplaincorps.af.mil/news/chaplaincorpsprograms/marriagecare.asp>.

offers activities to help the couple normalize their issues, and one-on-one time to help them personalize the information and topics to their own marriage. This three-pronged concept is partially based on advice and guidance received from Dr. Janet L. Richardson, an educational consultant and best-selling author.<sup>28</sup>

In a large group setting, Marriage Care facilitators provide limited tips and advice based on their personal experience, Bible verses, or simple takeaways from marriage “experts.” I limit the time facilitators have to give advice. This is done to allow couples to spend more time normalizing and personalizing the information. I also limit PowerPoint slides to what is absolutely necessary. Each one-hour session utilizes a maximum of seven slides.<sup>29</sup>

“Normalizing” within the Marriage Care program involves small group work borrowed in part from Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and from group therapy.<sup>30</sup> The Social Learning Theory says that, “behavior is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning.”<sup>31</sup> Military members experience life in close proximity to other military members. They spend 8 to 12 hours a day at work and often relax together after work. They deploy to remote locations for six to 15 months at a time and talk about nearly everything. In my own deployment experience, I noticed a common topic is marriage. In these battlefield conversations, military members tend to focus on the extremes: either they talk about how their spouse is “perfect in every way,” or they

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28. Janet Richardson, Ph.D. (Author’s mother), interview by Steven Richardson, Arlington Va, June 1, 2007.

29. In my opinion, the military has gone overboard with PowerPoint briefings—to the point that people tend to tune them out.

30. Jackson Kyle and Albert Bandura, “Social Learning Theory,” *Contemporary Sociology* 7, no. 1 (1978): 84.

31. Saul McLeod, “Albert Bandura: Social Learning Theory,” *Simplypsychology.Org*, last modified 2015, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://www.simplypsychology.org/bandura.html>.

share negative stories about their spouse (or their buddy's spouse). The result can be a skewed view of marriage for those listening in on the conversations. By meeting in small groups with their peers in the context of a marriage retreat or seminar, military members learn observationally that the issues and struggles they have are common and entirely surmountable.

Normalizing helps participants realize that even though they don't have the best marriage in the world, they don't have the worst either. Every couple has strengths and weaknesses. Military marriages face issues civilian couples seldom encounter--things like deployments; unwanted, undesirable, or untimely relocations; an inability to quit one's job if desired; and punishment (even jail time) should the military member fail in his or her military responsibilities. To say the least, these issues can stress a marriage. It helps, however, to discover that they are "normal" for military marriages. Others in the group face the same challenges and stressors.

A danger of small group work with couples is that someone may inappropriately share negative or personal information about his or her spouse. The Marriage Care program protects against individuals embarrassing their spouses by having them only discuss their personal history or objective topics like personality traits or forgiveness.

In a one-on-one setting, couples are given the opportunity to personalize information learned through advising or normalizing. This is called "Knee to Knee and Eye to Eye." Up to four times per session, couples place their chairs directly in front of one another so that their knees are touching. They are then encouraged to maintain eye contact while discussing a particular subject. This is done in a quiet, private place somewhere in the conference room so that no one overhears the conversation.

The process of the Marriage Care program is what makes it unique, but the content of the sessions is also important. For the remainder of this chapter I will discuss some of the theories behind the content of each session. The content is fairly common among marriage enrichment programs such as PREP, LINKS, Family Wellness, Laughing Your Way to a Healthy Marriage, and others.<sup>32</sup> Much of the content contained in Marriage Care is borrowed (with permission) from other programs or contained in basic counseling theories.

### **Theory Behind MarriageCare Session 1 and MC-OD Sessions 1 and 2:**

#### **Multigenerational Transmission as it relates to MarriageCare and MC-OD**

In the first session of the MarriageCare retreat and the first and second sessions of MC-OD, participants investigate patterns of behaviors and attitudes from their childhood that may be affecting their marriage. This is accomplished through the use of a self-produced family rules work sheet, a small group sharing of family rules, Knee to Knee and Eye to Eye time, an illustration from the Hebrew Scriptures about generational curses and generational blessings, and an illustration from the facilitator's life. Much of the theory behind the session can be attributed to the concepts inherent in Bowenian therapy inspired by the work of Murray Bowen. "Bowen was the first to realize that the history of our family creates a template which shapes the values, thoughts, and experiences of each generation, as well as how that generation passes down these things to the next generation."<sup>33</sup> Bowenian therapy addresses the individual's connection to his or her

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32. Programs mentioned can be obtained at <https://www.prepinc.com>, <http://www.lovethinks.com>, <http://www.familywellness.com> and <http://markgungor.com>.

33. "Bowenian Family Therapy," *Psychpage.com*, last modified 2015, accessed November 11, 2015, <http://www.psychpage.com/learning/library/counseling/bowen.html>.



Family of Origin (family system within the formative years that could include, parents, caregivers, friends, role models or even teachers) as well as transmitted attitudes, actions, and patterns of behavior. These patterns of behavior that “generate in childhood years are often re-created in the intimate relationships of the future.”<sup>34</sup> This process, labeled Multigenerational Transmission,

...entails the way family emotional processes are transferred and maintained over the generations. This captures how the whole family joins in The Family Projection Process, for example... (‘He’s just like his Uncle Albert - he was always irresponsible too’ or ‘She’s just like your cousin Jenny - she was divorced four times.’)<sup>35</sup>

Having couples talk about possible multigenerational transmission in their marriage can “bring about a clarifying effect of historical insight that causes family members to recognize ‘family scripts’ (Byng-Hall, 1995) learned during growing up years.”<sup>36</sup>

As a counselor works with clients investigating patterns of multigenerational transmission, various revelations can emerge. Similar to Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, multigenerational transmission helps explain how adults seem to emulate many of the attitudes and behaviors of their family of origin. Children often learn unspoken rules of behavior, beliefs and attitudes from the behavior, and beliefs and attitudes of the people they spent the most time with growing up. They commonly emulate these patterns as adults.

This process also occurs when patterns of attachment “develop where similar levels of attachment are passed down from one generation to the next. For example, the

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34. Frederick A. DiBlasio, “The Use Of A Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention Within Intergenerational Family Therapy,” *J Family Therapy* 20, no. 1 (1998): 77.

35. Psychpage, “Bowenian Family Therapy.”

36. DiBlasio, “The Use Of A Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention,” 80.

lack of positive attachment between a child and parents leads to a lack of attachment between the child and his or her own children later.”<sup>37</sup>

The goal of this session is to help couples realize that multigenerational transmission patterns can be changed. “Therapists empower clients with control and assist them in the positive differentiation of the self (Bowen, 1985) when they learn that they do not have to be the victim of their own or other family members’ emotional states.”<sup>38</sup> Couples have the ability to choose new behaviors, beliefs and attitudes. Understanding the behaviors, beliefs and attitudes that were passed down by their families of origin may empower them to make this change. Although the benefit of helping a couple investigate his or her multigenerational transmission patterns may be substantial,<sup>39</sup> the length of time typically required to investigate these patterns “ranges from four to six hours.”<sup>40</sup> This time frame would generally preclude its usage in most retreats or seminars. However, through the use of a “family rules” handout, small group interaction, one-on-one time, and time after the sessions in a retreat setting, Marriage Care programs have been able to accomplish this goal in a greatly reduced timeframe.

### **Theory Behind Session 2: Reframing as it relates to MarriageCare and MC-OD**

In Session 2 of the MarriageCare retreat, facilitators help couples reinterpret the meaning of frustrating and annoying actions and events, placing them within the lens of their spouse’s unique personality traits. Donald Capps asserts, “The meaning any event

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37. DiBlasio, “The Use Of A Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention,” 80.

38. DiBlasio, “The Use Of A Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention,” 78.

39. DiBlasio, “The Use Of A Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention,” 81.

40. DiBlasio, “The Use Of A Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention,” 81.

has for us depends upon the frame in which we perceive it.”<sup>41</sup> This is often called reframing. Reframing can be defined as, “Changing the frame in which a person perceives events in order to change the meaning. When the meaning changes, the person’s responses and behaviors also change.”<sup>42</sup> Reframing is commonly used in Solution Focused counseling.<sup>43</sup> All United States Air Force chaplains are trained in Solution Focused counseling, so training them as facilitators to help couples practice reframing within their marriage is a logical step. “Reframing is (also) widely used in counseling, including pastoral counseling. Any time a pastor or counselor tries to get a couple to see something differently or consider a new point of view, the objective is reframing the current situation in a more positive or actionable way.”<sup>44</sup>

Session 2 begins with a small group game that helps couples see the positive and negative “spins” that exist within every personality trait. The assertion is that personality traits are neutral. It is the actions and attitudes, often spurred by those traits, that are positive or negative. The goal of the session is to help couples focus on the positive traits of their spouses by reminding them that the neutral personality traits that stimulate negative actions can also stimulate positive ones. It is these personality traits and positive actions that probably helped the couple fall in love in the first place.

Following the game, facilitators have participants choose two of the “best” personality traits their spouse possesses. According to Lipchik, “It is likely that the context in which the reframing occurs, the emotional climate, plays a role in how the

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41. Donald Capps, *Reframing: A New Method in Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 10.

42. Richard Bandler, John Grinder and Steve Andreas, *Reframing: Neuro-linguistic Programming and the Transformation of Meaning* (Boulder, CO: Real People Press, 1982), 1.

43. Capps, *Reframing*, 11.

44. Capps, *Reframing*, 10.

reframe is accepted.”<sup>45</sup> The facilitator then asks the couples to use Knee-to-Knee and Eye-to-Eye to share those two traits in context. The couples practice reframing using those traits.

For example, a couple may choose the personality trait of humor. Being humorous can have both positive and negative connotations or “spins.” A spouse may consistently say the wrong thing at the wrong time because he or she is trying to be funny (negative spin). On the other hand, the spouse may use humor as encouragement when his or her marriage partner is having a bad day (positive spin). By the end of the session the couple is encouraged to reframe the negative spin they see in themselves into a positive affirmation. According to Lipchik, “Reflection of behaviors from a positive perspective can change the person’s perspective of him or her self.”<sup>46</sup> By teaching the spouses reframing in terms of personality traits, the spouses learn to respect one another even in the midst of frustration. As a result, the husband or wife is better able to deal with annoying actions through positive communication. This will be outlined in Session 3.

Helping couples learn to reframe negative situations within Session 2 requires flexibility and the ability to personalize the curriculum therapeutically. According to DiBlasio, “Even in marriage counseling, the counselor cannot know exactly what will need to be reframed. That depends on what the counselee has to say.”<sup>47</sup> Marriage Care facilitators give only enough advice to ensure that the couple knows what to do one-on-one. Then the facilitator walks around the room and helps couples personalize the lesson

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45. Lipchik, *Beyond Technique*, 72.

46. Lipchik, *Beyond Technique*, 72.

47. Capps, *Reframing*, 10.

as needed. At the end of the session, the facilitator quotes Philippians 4:8.<sup>48</sup> This is because some couples, especially committed Christians, will dismiss the reframing as an attempt to ignore or cover up wrong behaviors. According to DiBlasio, “A common fear of many religiously-oriented clients is that the therapist will not appreciate or understand their faith perspective.”<sup>49</sup> Using chaplains as facilitators and quoting the Philippians passage tends to assuage that fear without offending people from other religious backgrounds or from no religious background at all.

### **Theory Behind Session 3: Communication theory as it relates to MarriageCare and MC-OD**

Session 3 addresses the basic building blocks of healthy communication. Both the MarriageCare retreat and the MC-OD use I-Statements as a way of explaining and illustrating communication theory. Although they have been taught for many years as a communication tool, I-Statements have fallen out of favor lately with some marriage experts for fear couples will forget to use the tool when it is most needed.<sup>50</sup> They believe that if a couple cannot remember to use the tool during an argument it should not be taught. The same thing is claimed of any patterned communication technique designed for use during a crisis.<sup>51</sup> Another reason some experts shy away from teaching I-Statements is that I-Statements can potentially be used as an excuse to escalate the attack or manipulate the offender. It is not that these marriage expert want to eliminate the use

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48. “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

139. DiBlasio, “The Use Of A Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention,” 84.

50. John Johnson, “Are ‘I’ Statements Better Than ‘You’ Statements?”, *Psychology Today*, last modified 2015, accessed November 12, 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/cui-bono/201211/are-i-statements-better-you-statements>.

51. Johnson, “Are ‘I’ Statements better than ‘You’ Statements?”

of I-Statements entirely; they just want therapists to use caution when presenting a communication formula as the only solution to every communication problem.<sup>52</sup>

In the Marriage Care programs we teach I-Statements as a tool to help couples understand some basic tenants of communication in a way that should be easy to apply to their lives. Marriage Care facilitators use I-Statements as a four-step process focusing on the “issue,” the “feeling,” the “reason,” and the “request.” First, facilitators use I-Statements to encourage couples to be specific and immediate when addressing an issue. Non-specific language like “always” and “never” will likely cause an argument to worsen. Being specific and immediate when addressing issues is one of antidotes to the problem of criticism (as postulated in John Gottman’s theory of the “Four Horseman of the Apocalypse.” The “Four Horsemen” are four behaviors Gottman believes will bring destruction to any relationship.<sup>53</sup> They are addressed in Session 4 of MC-OD).

The next step for facilitators is to encourage the use of feeling words in expressing an issue. Although feeling words can be used inappropriately to manipulate one’s spouse, feeling words can be extraordinarily helpful in connecting the complaint to something the person’s spouse has experienced before. For example, though a husband may not fully understand why leaving his underwear in the middle of the bedroom floor makes his wife feel frustrated or marginalized (this is an illustration from the MarriageCare retreat video used in Session 1 by Jeff Allen), he can understand feeling frustrated or marginalized. Consequently, he has a slightly better understanding of the situation because he understands the emotions. He may not express his emotion the same

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52. Johnson, “Are ‘I’ Statements better than ‘You’ Statements?”

53. Alexandra Mason, “The Four Horsemen: The Antidotes,” *The Gottman Relationship Blog*, last modified 2013, accessed November 11, 2015, <http://www.gottmanblog.com/four-horsemen/2014/10/29/the-four-horsemen-the-antidotes>.

way his wife expresses hers, and he may not even define the emotion in the same way, but he probably can empathize with the emotion.<sup>54</sup> The mere practice of empathy within a marriage can “deepen intimacy and boost relationship satisfaction.”<sup>55</sup>

Facilitators also use I-Statements to encourage couples to share the reason behind the emotion. Sharing the reason lessens the risk that the emotion will be used to manipulate the other person. By sharing the reason, the communicator is allowing for a healthy discussion of the issue rather than simply making a demand.

Finally, facilitators teach I-Statements to help couples learn to make specific requests of their spouse. These are not demands. These requests introduced as the starting off point for meaningful discussions about what solution can work for the benefit of the marriage. Family Wellness, a family-enrichment program, advocates being honest about requests. It uses the phrase, “Know what you want, say what you want, get what you want.”<sup>56</sup> Although it may be direct and over simplified, the intent is valid. Unless couples can share their desired outcome, spouses are expected to mind read. This will often lead to more miscommunication and arguments. Facilitators explain that being specific about the issue, sharing a feeling, and sharing the reason is not enough if the goal is a change of action. If the wife wants her husband to not leave his underwear in the middle of the bedroom floor, eventually she needs to make a verbal request for him not leave his underwear in the middle of the bedroom floor. They can then discuss the request until a healthy agreement is made and hopefully both of their needs are met (maybe move the

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54. Barbra Markway, 'How To Crack The Code Of Men'S Feelings,' *Psychology Today*, last modified 2015, accessed November 10, 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/living-the-questions/201401/how-crack-the-code-men-s-feelings>.

55. Greater Good, “Empathy Definition”, last modified 2015, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/empathy/definition>.

56. Joseph Hernandez, *Family Wellness Skills: Quick Assessment and Practical Interventions for the Mental Health Professional*, 1st edition, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., n.d.), 39.

clothes hamper or get him a basketball hoop on top of the hamper). Her need for him to not leave his underwear in the middle of the bedroom floor may be perfectly clear to her, but it may not be obvious to him at all.

In addition to I-Statements, facilitators in Session 3 share the importance of problem solving by choosing to value each other's point of view rather than insisting on being right and trying to "win" the argument. Facilitators inform couples that when they fight to be right, to "win" an argument, their marriage will often be the loser in the fight. Most husbands and wives are reluctant to relinquish their "rightness" for the health of the marriage; instead, they try to convince their spouse of the correctness of their point of view. It's no surprise that two people with different personality traits, different families of origin, and different life experiences are going to occasionally have differing opinions and different points of view. The solution to this values and personality conflict is not necessarily to compromise; it is to communicate value and respect for the partner's differences.<sup>57</sup> As couples learn to value each other's opinions and points of view, they communicate that they value their spouse. A person that feels valued is often quicker to listen to his or her spouse.

#### **Theory Behind Session 4: Conflict, love, and forgiveness as related to MarriageCare and MC-OD**

Most of Session 4 is comprised of sections and ideas from off-the-shelf programs used with permission. The theory behind these programs has already been set forth by the

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57. John Shore, 'A Great Marriage Is About NOT Compromising,' last modified 2009, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/johnshore/2009/05/compromise-has-no-place-in-a-healthy-marriage>.



original authors. They include John Gottman's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,<sup>58</sup> Garry Chapman's Five Love Languages,<sup>59</sup> and Garry Chapman's Five Languages of Apology.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to receiving a brief overview of these books and programs, couples are given an opportunity to talk about forgiveness. They were first introduced to the topic of forgiveness in Session 1 as part of the "Family Rules handout." At that point expectations and behaviors involved in forgiveness were presented in the discussion of multigenerational transmission. In Session 4, in addition to learning the importance of apologizing and some ways to apologize, couples define forgiveness and learn the value of choosing to forgive their partner. According to DiBlasio, "When we are hurt, we seldom feel like forgiving automatically. Therapists empower clients with control and assist them in the positive differentiation of the self (Bowen, 1985) when they learn that they do not have to be the victim of their own or other family members' emotional states."<sup>61</sup>

DiBlasio goes on to say, "Forgiveness here is viewed as an act of the will, a choice, to let go or to hold. People can separate their thoughts of resentment and bitterness from their feeling of hurt."<sup>62</sup> Even though forgiveness can be difficult, people ultimately have a choice to forgive or not to forgive. They also have the ability to make forgiveness happen. Discussing forgiveness in a small group setting can help empower participants to make the decision to forgive. By choosing not to forgive, individuals are

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58. John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *Why Marriages Succeed Or Fail* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

59. Gary D Chapman, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate* (Chicago: Northfield Pub. 1995).

60. Gary D Chapman and Jennifer Thomas, *The Five Languages Of Apology* (Chicago: Northfield Pub. 2006).

61. DiBlasio, "The Use Of A Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention," 78.

62. DiBlasio, "The Use Of A Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention," 78.

punishing themselves. “Ironically, the victims become their own offenders as they stew in unresolved resentments that can lead to deterioration in their physical health, emotional stability, cognitive functioning, behavioral responses and spiritual well-being.”<sup>63</sup> For the benefit of the marriage and for the person’s own resiliency, spouses need to practice forgiveness. A very good marriage is made up of two very good forgivers.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of the Marriage Care program is to help couples begin the journey toward change. Change can be difficult. People get so comfortable with their lives and with their issues that they tend to resist change, fearing that the change will be more difficult than what they are enduring. The JBER Marriage Care program uses an overarching process of change to help couples move beyond their fears and homeostasis to develop healthy patterns of commitment, respect, communication, love and forgiveness. The MarriageCare retreat and MC-OD are unique and effective, not because of their informational content, but because of how couples are empowered to make changes in their lives.

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63. DiBlasio, “The Use Of A Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention,” 79.

## *CHAPTER 4*

### PROJECT DESIGN

#### **Introduction**

This research project was implemented and refined at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) between August, 2013, and December, 2015. JBER is the largest military installation in Alaska with nearly 12,000 active duty Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines. It is also the headquarters for the Alaska Command, US Army Alaska and the Alaska State National Guard.<sup>1</sup>

The project focused on the JBER Marriage Care program, which includes a combination of the USAF MarriageCare weekend retreat and the JBER Marriage Care-On Demand (MC-OD) seminar. The JBER Marriage Care program was designed to help military members and their spouses strengthen and make lasting, positive changes in their marital relationship. The intent of the study was to determine the effectiveness of the JBER Marriage Care program, including the MarriageCare retreat, the MC-OC seminar, and the training program for facilitators. The project author led six JBER chaplains and three JBER chaplain assistants to facilitate the MarriageCare retreats and MC-OD seminars. Three hundred forty-six couples participated in the Marriage Care program events between August, 2013, and December, 2015. The project author also provided marriage counseling training to the JBER active duty military chaplains to help them offer better pastoral care for military married couples.

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1. "Joint Base Elmendorf - Richardson JBER, Alaska," last modified 2015, accessed 12 Nov 2015, [http://www.militaryinstallations.dod.mil/pls/psgprod/f?p=132:CONTENT:0::NO::P4\\_INST\\_ID,P4\\_INST\\_TYPE:7190,INSTALLATION](http://www.militaryinstallations.dod.mil/pls/psgprod/f?p=132:CONTENT:0::NO::P4_INST_ID,P4_INST_TYPE:7190,INSTALLATION)

In 2008, this project author and two other Air Force chaplains developed the Air Force MarriageCare retreat at the request of the Air Force Chief of Chaplains. Four years later the project author realized there was a need at his military installation for a shorter, more flexible marriage enrichment event, one that would meet the needs of shift workers and allow more military couples to participate at a lower cost to the military installation. He subsequently worked with a small team of chaplains to create an abbreviated, seminar version of MarriageCare and called it MarriageCare-On Demand (MC-OD).

Although this project focuses on the project author's work at JBER between 2013 and 2015, the author has led over 60 Air Force-wide MarriageCare retreats in the past several years and trained 350 chaplains and chaplain assistants to lead MarriageCare retreats. As of December 2015, over 15,000 United States Air Force members and spouses have attended a MarriageCare retreat.

Table 1: JBER Marriage Care Events and Participation, 2013-2015

Year	MarriageCare Events	Couples Attending MarriageCare Events	MC-OD Events	Couples Attending MC-OD Events
2013	2	45	0	N/A
2014	2	77	3	35
2015	7	164	3	25 (+32 individual attendees)

### **Marriage Care Facilitator Training**

Each chaplain and chaplain assistant who facilitated a JBER Marriage Care program participated in at least 20 hours of training. The training included either a one-and-a-half day class and attendance at a MarriageCare retreat (offered 2010-2012), a

three-day seminar held at the USAF Chaplain Corps College in Columbia, South Carolina (offered in 2012), a 20-hour online course provided through the USAF Chaplain Corps secure website, or one-on-one MarriageCare training. Marriage counseling training and coaching/feedback were also provided as needed by the project author.

In the fall of 2010, this project author began traveling to various Air Force bases training military chaplains on how to conduct MarriageCare retreats. The courses opened on a Thursday with the theory behind the retreats and a step-by-step guide on how to teach each session. On Friday, chaplain trainees completed the step-by-step guide and learned how to organize and conduct a retreat. From Friday evening to Sunday morning, chaplain trainees attended as participants with their spouses if possible a MarriageCare retreat facilitated by this project author. The trainees and project author met for questions and final instructions immediately following the retreat. MC-OD did not exist at that time and was therefore not part of the training. Four of the JBER chaplain facilitators were trained through this process.

In the summer of 2012, the Air Force Chaplain Corps College in Columbia, South Carolina, secured funding to bring 50 chaplains to the campus to receive MarriageCare training from this project author. The first day of training focused on the theory behind a MarriageCare retreat. The second day dealt with how to conduct the retreat. The third day consisted of watching a video of a retreat and team-teaching one of the sessions. One of the JBER chaplain facilitators was trained through this three-day course.

The MarriageCare on-line training was developed in 2012 by this project author to contend with the lack of funding for on-site training programs. The online training took six months to develop and field test. It began with an overview of the learning

theory behind a MarriageCare retreat followed by a brief synopsis of each session. Facilitators were evaluated by two measures: a multiple-choice test, and a mock MarriageCare session recorded and graded by a trained MarriageCare chaplain or chaplain assistant. Three chaplains and three chaplain assistants at JBER obtained their MarriageCare training through the on-line program.

The one-on-one training was provided by the author of this paper and focused on the reasons behind each element of the MarriageCare retreat as well as a step-by-step guide to facilitating an MC-OD seminar. Because facilitators tended to default to information and retreat practices they had gleaned from other sources, the project author spent a great deal of time with each JBER MarriageCare-trained chaplain and chaplain assistant teaching them MC-OD and refining their MarriageCare retreat skills. To further safeguard the fidelity and integrity of the MarriageCare and MC-OD processes, individuals in charge of an MC-OD were given an MC-OD checklist (Appendix A) and a script (Appendix B).

In addition to the training mentioned above, the project author led marriage-counseling training for the JBER chaplains. The training focused on preparing them to better care for couples after a Marriage Care program. It included the following topics: “What is my Calling in Counseling?,” “Theory of Change,” “Trusting the Process,” “Not Swinging for the Fences,” and “Theology of Marriage Counseling.” Because of the military operational tempo at JBER between 2013 and 2015, none of the chaplains was able to attend all five counseling training sessions. All but two were moved to different military installations by the end of the study.

### **MarriageCare Retreat Program Structure**

The MarriageCare retreat is officially sponsored by the United States Air Force and is offered at the request, and generally with the financial support, of senior Air Force commanders. The program is designed to be relevant to military members and to address the unique challenges military marriages face when one of the marriage partners is active duty military or in an activated status with the Air National Guard or Air Force Reserve. MarriageCare is a faith-based program that includes principles embraced by all major faith groups. The curriculum was developed in-house, and the right to use the program videos was graciously donated by the producers/authors of the materials. The only cost of a MarriageCare retreat is the hotel room and food, which are provided through government funding. There are no costs to the participants.

MarriageCare events are scheduled Friday evening to Sunday morning and held at a quality hotel or resort at least 40 minutes but not more than 2.5 hours from the military installation. The installation chapel chooses the location of the retreat and provides Chaplain Corps facilitators. The hotel or resort must be at least 40 minutes away so that couples will not be tempted to go home during the breaks. Upon selection to attend a MarriageCare retreat at JBER couple receive a welcome letter (Appendix C).

All MarriageCare retreats at JBER were held at the world-famous Alyeska resort in Girdwood, Alaska. The resort is roughly 45 minutes from JBER and has wonderful rooms and meals. The weekend generally began with dinner at 6 p.m. and a pre-session from 7 to 7:30 p.m. There were four one-hour retreat sessions: one on Friday (7:30-8:30 p.m.) and three on Saturday (9-10 a.m., 10:30-11:30 a.m., 7-8 p.m.). The sessions were focused on the four components of the traditional marriage vows. There was also a 5-

hour uninterrupted block of "Couple Time" on Saturday afternoon, and a final 30-minute wrap-up session on Sunday morning.

Using the traditional marriage vows as the structure of the sessions connected the program content to the couples' marriage ceremonies. "I Take Thee" focused on family rules; "To Have and To Hold" focused on reframing toward the positive; "For Better, For Worse" focused on communication; and "To Love and to Cherish" focused on love and forgiveness.

The 30-minute wrap-up session on Sunday morning was followed by an optional Christian worship service that was generally well attended. If the chaplain facilitator was not a Christian, that chaplain could offer a worship service according to his or her own faith tradition. If the facilitators were both chaplain assistants, they would invite a chaplain to offer the worship service.

Each session featured humor through a video and generally involved 40% large group "advising," 30% small group "normalizing," and 30% one-on-one "personalizing." During a MarriageCare retreat, Chaplain Corps facilitators try not to act as experts. A MarriageCare session is not an opportunity for a facilitator to talk about what helped his or her marriage but to let the couples dialogue about their own marriages.

### **MarriageCare Agenda**

The pre-session begins with a game called "The Power of Ten," in which males and females are separated into two groups and try to answer a series of fun marriage-based questions. During this time they also fill out the pre-test (which will be discussed later in this chapter). Following the game, the couples introduce themselves by having



one of them (the more outgoing one) share their names, how long they have been married, and a memory from their wedding day. The memory of their wedding day is then used by the facilitator to introduce the theme of the retreat, the traditional marriage vows. Couples are reminded of the traditional wedding vows, “I take thee, to have and to hold, for better or for worse, to love and to cherish, till death do we part.” Even couples who did not exchange vows during their marriage ceremony (sometimes more than half the attendees) identify with the traditional wedding vows.

The first session begins with a humorous marriage video, generally a nine-minute clip from Jeff Allen’s standup comedy routine. After briefly describing the theme of the first session, “I Take Thee,” facilitators distribute the MarriageCare Family Rules handout, which has topics such as family traditions, forgiveness, communication, religion, money, and separation. Participants then share a family rule they feel comfortable sharing around the table with two or three other couples, thus normalizing their experiences of family rules. Next, couples learn about Knee-to-Knee and Eye-to-Eye communication, and they practice this technique with their spouse by answering specific questions about family rules. The facilitator then gives a story, a biblical reference, and some general advice based on multigenerational transmission. Finally, participants are encouraged to use some of the rest of the evening to discuss what healthy family rules they want to pass down to the generations who follow them (children, grandchildren, friends, family, etc.).

The second session, entitled “To have and to hold,” begins on Saturday morning with an entertaining video that focuses on how differing personality traits can attract a couple to one another and yet later cause problems. Couples play the “Spin Game” with

the goal of subtlety introducing the topic of reframing. In the “Spin Game,” couples divide into groups and list the positive or negative “spins” of a personality trait. For example, one personality trait discussed is, “Mike is a hard worker.” Possible negative spins that have been suggested based on Mike’s personality trait have included “Mike is rarely at home,” “stressed out at work,” “an absentee parent,” or “emotionally distant from his wife.” Possible positive spins have included, “He succeeds at work,” “provides for his family,” and “works hard at projects for his wife.” Couples spend the rest of the session alternating between one-on-one interactions and the large group setting while practicing positive reframing with their spouses.

“For Better, For Worse,” the theme of the third session, is focused on communication. It generally begins with a short video from the widely-known and popular “Laughing your Way to a Better Marriage” seminar. The clip focuses on the different communication styles of men and women. Couples are separated into male and female groups for a game about frustrations with the opposite gender. The results of this game are used to illustrate the disrespect and lack of value often conveyed by poor communication. Couples are then taught communication principles through the structure of “I-Statements,” and they practice them with their spouses. Finally, the facilitator offers communication tips such as choosing to respect and value a spouse’s point of view over trying to win an argument, the importance of taking a mutually agreed-upon break when the conversation gets heated, and the importance of agreeing when the break will end.

The final session, “To Love and To Cherish,” begins with an amusing video on valuing one’s spouse. After couples are introduced to the theme of the session and encouraged to define “love” and “cherish,” they are taught the “The 5 Love Languages”

and given time to discuss and practice their language with each other.<sup>2</sup> They then divide into small groups to define forgiveness. At the end of the session, couples are taught “The 5 Languages of Apology” and practice them one-on-one.<sup>3</sup> On Sunday morning, there is an entertaining and engaging video on the marital expectations of engaged couples and an end-of-course survey.

### **Marriage Care-On Demand Seminar Structure**

The goal of the MC-OD seminar is the same as the goal of the MarriageCare weekend retreat: to help couples strengthen their marriages and make lasting, positive changes. The seminar was developed in response to a often-expressed pastoral concern among the members of the JBER chapel staff that Air Force chapels, including the JBER chapel, do not receive enough financial support to send every couple who wants (and needs) a marriage enrichment event to a weekend retreat. In an attempt to solve this problem and support shift workers who generally don not get weekends off, MarriageCare was offered as a seminar on the military installation.

Much of the content of MC-OD is similar to the MarriageCare retreat. An MC-OD seminar has four sessions that can be presented individually or as a one-day event. As with the MarriageCare retreats, the seminar is faith-based, relevant to military members, and free. Additionally, the seminar sessions focus on the topics of family rules/standards, communication, love, and forgiveness. Each session has a whole-group advising portion, a small-group normalizing portion, and, whenever possible, time for one-on-one

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2. Gary D Chapman, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate* (Chicago: Northfield Pub. 1995).

156. Gary D Chapman and Jennifer Thomas, *The Five Languages Of Apology* (Chicago: Northfield Pub. 2006).

personalizing. As with MarriageCare, the sessions are geared toward formulating specific, well-defined action steps each couple can take to positively impact their marriages after they leave the event.

Of necessity, there are significant differences between a MarriageCare retreat and an MC-OD seminar. The most obvious differences are the location and the amount of time available. While MarriageCare retreats take place at a hotel or resort away from the military installation, MC-OD seminars are held on base, during the duty day, generally in a room within the military unit or at an installation community center. MC-OD seminars are conducted in close coordination with the flight, squadron, or group commander's needs and schedule. The intent is that each squadron chaplain and chaplain assistant, known as a Religious Support Team (RST), would meet with his or her commander and explain the benefits of a MC-OD seminar. The RST would then offer the commander options including possible dates, locations, and program lengths. Based on the needs of the unit and the amount of time the commander is able to schedule, commanders can choose a full-day seminar, a two-hour seminar or a one-hour lunch seminar. If the commander chooses the one-hour or two-hour option, he or she can also choose the topics to be covered in the seminar (family rules/standards, communication, love, and forgiveness). The RST then advertises the event, reserves the facility, provides the meal or snacks, and facilitates the event. All the squadron has to do is aid in advertising. All sessions are offered during the workweek between 9:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. during the school year. This timeframe minimizes childcare needs as school age children are still in school. If childcare is required, the chapel arranges with the JBER Child Development Center (on-base daycare centers) to pay for hourly childcare.

In consultation with a professional educator, this project author ensured that each session contains all three learning modalities: kinesthetic, auditory, and visual.<sup>4</sup> Each session includes:

- A video learning tool for visual learners
- One-on-One conversation for auditory learners
- Movement and games for kinesthetic learners
- Comedic stories and videos to keep everyone engaged.

At the completion of each session, couples make a vow to change actions and patterns of behavior within their marriages.

Because of Department of Defense Title 10 restrictions against paying for the room and meals of people who do not have a military identification card, MarriageCare retreats are only for married couples. MC-OD seminars, however, are open to engaged as well as married couples.

### **Marriage Care-On Demand Seminar Agenda**

Sessions 1 and 2 of MC-OD are based on the same principles and learning objectives as Session 1 of the MarriageCare retreat. The goal is to develop an understanding of each spouse's family of origin patterns of behavior and the couple's current family patterns of behavior. Sessions 1 begins with an amusing video looking at the baggage people carry into their marriages. Session 2 opens with another humorous video focusing on one of the family rules people sometimes adopt. During the video, the facilitator distributes the MC-OD version of the Family Rules handout to each participant. The handout (Appendix D) lists the various topics. The Family Rules handout

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4. Janet L. Richardson, Ph.D., interview by author, Arlington VA, 1 June 2013.

helps participants begin to understand some of the attitudes and patterns of behavior they inherited from their parents, grandparents or parental figures. In each of the categories, individuals are asked to record what they can remember about the actions of their parental figures from their childhood. Because merely completing the handout worksheet is not enough for couples to understand the multigenerational transmission process at work in their lives, couples talk about their childhood family rules in a small group setting. The small group framework helps normalize their experiences. Couples tend to discover even more about their family rules as they hear about other people's rules that may be similar or dissimilar to theirs.

The couples are then taught Knee-to-Knee, Eye-to-Eye communication skills. They move their chairs facing one another (anywhere in the room so they can have privacy) and sit with their knees touching while looking each other in the eyes. They use this technique in every session. To engage kinetic learners, each couple is given a four-foot portion of rope. They each take an end of a rope and share similarities and differences in their childhood family rules. As they share, they move their hands closer or further away from each other on the rope. This helps them kinetically see how far or close their family-of-origin rules were from their partner's. During the two sessions, couples are encouraged to go deeper into the issues involved in family rules including differing morals, ethics and even religious practices. The second session utilizes trust-building stories and activities to help the couple visualize a change and move toward a solution to potential conflict that can be engendered by their differing family rules.

At the end of sessions 1 and 2 the chaplain talks about the importance of analyzing the couple's personal family rules and creating shared family rules that are

healthy for the couple and their family. Every session ends with reading and discussing the vow from Ruth to Naomi found in the biblical Book of Ruth (Ruth 1:16-17). By the end of the seminar, the couples will be able to write a vow to one another similar to Ruth's vow.

The third session focuses on building healthy communication. Whereas in the MarriageCare retreat, couples spend time sharing frustrations they experience with the other gender, in Session 3 of MC-OD couples share what they believe are the greatest needs of men and women. The reason the couples in MC-OD discuss needs rather than frustrations is because they do not have time outside of the sessions in the seminar to deal with any issues that may arise when discussing their frustrations with the other gender. When the couples return to the large group, the facilitator presents basic needs of men and women and explains how these needs can lead to arguments. Healthy communication is presented as a way to express one's needs and have one's needs met. "I messages" are used once again as a tool to teach healthy communication, and participants spend time as a couple honing their communication skills. The session ends with couples talking about the parts of their lives and marriages they consider sacred and how to make even more of their marriage sacred.

Session 4 of MC-OD is similar to Session 4 of the MarriageCare retreat with the addition of a small group discussion on antidotes to Dr. John Gottman's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.<sup>5</sup> Gottman's research has shown that it is not the appearance of conflict, but how it is managed that predicts the success or failure of a relationship.<sup>6</sup>

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5. John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *Why Marriages Succeed Or Fail*.

6. John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *Why Marriages Succeed Or Fail*.

After a video on making marriages work, couples are introduced to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and form small groups to discuss the challenges of building a healthy marriage in the military and the antidotes to each of the horsemen. The antidotes presented help couples regulate quarrels and manage four destructive communication actions: criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. The session ends with a discussion about the spiritual issues of forgiveness and apology using Dr. Gary Chapman's and Jennifer Thomas's *Five Languages of Apology*.<sup>7</sup> The goal of Session 4 is to help each couple protect their marriage from the everyday stresses that are inevitable, especially in military environments. For a script of the MC-OD process, see Appendix B.

### **Marriage Care-On Demand Program Challenges**

Although the structure of MC-OD was designed to reach more couples, there were several challenges in meeting the program goals. The shorter time framework, the on-base location as opposed to an off-base retreat center, and problems with attendance limited the seminar's scope and effectiveness.

One challenge was time. Since the MD-OD was a shorter seminar, the facilitator had to condense valuable information and delete some group activities. Additionally, the seminar had less time for couples to talk. The in-depth personal conversations between couples are critically important for solving problems, improving couple communication, and strengthening relationships.

Another challenge was the location. With the MarriageCare retreats, couples are

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7. Gary D Chapman and Jennifer Thomas, *The Five Languages Of Apology* (Chicago: Northfield Pub. 2006).



treated to an “all expense-paid” weekend at a beautiful resort. They are off-base, off-duty and free to wear civilian attire. Since the MC-OD seminars are held during the workday, participants are often in uniform, in a building on the base, and more likely to be distracted by work-related issues.

Attendance was a serious unanticipated obstacle. By design, MC-OD should have reached more couples because it was at a convenient location during work hours. It was actually difficult to get people to sign up for the seminars. Attendance was dependent on four variables:

First, there was a definite correlation between attendance at the seminars and the relationship the chaplain had with members of the unit. The better the unit members knew their chaplain, the more likely they were to attend the event. Chaplains were encouraged to get to know their units intimately and to personally invite unit members to attend the seminars.

Second, attendance correlated to how many of the unit spouses had jobs outside the home. Though we could often help military members be excused from work to attend the seminar, we had no way of helping civilian spouses get the required time off from their jobs. If a unit had a large number of spouses who worked outside of the home, attendance at MC-OD seminars was radically decreased.

Third, attendance often depended on the length of the event. Lunchtime events were better attended than all-day seminars. For example, the JBER Finance and Public Affairs office scheduled an all-day MC-OD seminar for November 6, 2015. Although the unit’s senior leadership was excited about the event and very supportive, only three couples signed up to attend. Three couples was not enough to do an MC-OD program

based on the large group, small group, and one-on-one model. The seminar was rescheduled as a luncheon event and 32 people attended.

Fourth, attendance was maximized if the couples did not have young children at home during the day. Many mothers who did not work outside of the home but had children too young to attend school were not comfortable with the idea of leaving their child in a Child Development Center.

### **Data Collection and Program Evaluation**

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative assessment measures. Quantitative measures included the collection of a basic Likert scale questionnaire pre-seminar and post-seminar. Qualitative data was gained from the participants who answered the questions, “What suggestions would you offer to make this event better in the future?” and, “What was the most beneficial part of this event?” Although this project author can use the data gathered from participants to improve the seminar and program, he cannot, because of government regulations, directly reference participants. Everything participants shared is confidential.

This project author has learned through the years that long surveys negatively impact their own validity. This is especially true for military members. Asking couples to fill out a lengthy survey can set a sour mood for the evening, so the Marriage Care pre-event survey has only one question. It asks, “On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being on the edge of divorce and 10 being completely satisfied, how satisfied are you with your marriage?” The same question is asked at the end of the event along with the agree/disagree statement, “This event strengthened my marriage.” (Appendix E).

I have been doing marriage retreats and seminars for seven years. The amount of data I already have available is priceless. I am able to base the validity of my project on a wide sampling of the target audience, over 12,000 military couples. This provides valuable latitudinal analysis. Unfortunately, I am not able to go back to couples at the six-month, one-year, or even the two-year mark in order to do a true longitudinal study because of government concerns with confidentiality and the fact that the military is a highly transient subculture. A high percentage of the people I ministered to just six months ago are now in Europe, Asia, or the Middle East!

Assessment data was also gained from questionnaires given to chaplains following their training. Since I am the supervisor for the chaplains involved in the project, there could be legitimate concern about the confidentiality and objectivity of their written assessments of the program. This was addressed and remedied by having the chaplains do written assessments with short-sentence or numbered responses. Rather than sending them to me, they sent their responses to a chaplain of equal rank to myself so that he could ensure the answers were completely anonymous. Questions for the chaplain facilitators who were trained for the project are as follows:

- On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your confidence in marriage counseling before and after the training.
- On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your competence in marriage counseling before and after the training.
- On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the effectiveness of the MarriageCare On-Demand seminar.
- Rate how comfortable you would be recommending the Marriage Care On-Demand seminar to a couple with a struggling marriage.
- Rate how comfortable you would be recommending the MarriageCare retreat to a couple with a struggling marriage.

- Share what you believe is the strength of the Marriage Care On-Demand seminar.
- Share what you believe to be the weaknesses of the Marriage Care On-Demand seminar.
- How can the counseling training be improved?

### **Conclusion**

Because military marriages are too important to allow even one couple to fail, the Marriage Care program at JBER is constantly adapting and striving to improve. Based on a chaplain's spiritual calling to care for all military members and their spouses, we deliberately chose not to study a control group or a test group. Rather, we chose to target our efforts toward helping every couple strengthen their marriage and make lasting, positive changes in their marital relationship. Although the MarriageCare retreat and the individual survey results from both the MarriageCare retreats and the MC-OD seminars belong to the United States Air Force, we are able to utilize the program and generalized results to evaluate the effectiveness of the JBER Marriage Care program between August, 2013 and December, 2015.

## *CHAPTER FIVE*

### OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the Marriage Care program at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), Anchorage, Alaska from August 2013 to December 2015. The study included an evaluation of the MarriageCare retreat, the Marriage Care On Demand (MC-OD) seminar, and the training program for facilitators. The effectiveness of these three elements of the Marriage Care program was evaluated with Likert-type scale questionnaires and a qualitative review of participant feedback.

#### **Evaluation of the Marriage Care Facilitator Training**

The JBER chaplains who facilitated Marriage Care events were trained in marriage counseling and program facilitation techniques to ensure they delivered effective seminars and retreats and were able to support the participants during and after the events. At the conclusion of the project, the chaplains completed a questionnaire to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. Although six chaplains were trained for this project, only two were able to participate in the program evaluation (Appendix F). The other four were transferred to other military installations. Because of Air Force regulations, the chaplains who had been transferred could not participate in the feedback

process.<sup>1</sup> As the study was not complete when the other four chaplains were assigned to other bases, those chaplains were not surveyed before they moved.

The facilitator-training program was evaluated using a two-question Likert-scale survey. Although the results were fairly positive, because of the small sampling it would be difficult to claim success or failure for the counseling training program based on the survey results. Results indicated that although facilitators felt prepared to offer marriage counseling before the counseling training, they felt more competent and more confident in their marriage counseling following the training.

### **Evaluation of the MarriageCare Retreat**

The effectiveness of the MarriageCare retreat was evaluated by quantitative and qualitative measures. Quantitative analysis was performed using a Likert-type survey given to the participants. The qualitative evaluation was completed from comments provided by participants, facilitators, and Air Force commanders.

The quantitative evaluation of the retreat used pre- and post-event surveys. Surveys were received from 500 participants. Due to shift-work responsibilities, some military members had to leave the retreat before its official conclusion, so it was rare to get a 100 percent response to the post-event survey. The pre-retreat survey included one question: “On a scale of 1 to 10, with ‘1’ being ready to divorce and ‘10’ being completely satisfied, how satisfied are you with your marriage?” To allow the project author to evaluate the impact of the retreat on the participants’ marriages, the post-event survey used the same question.

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1. Per Air Force Instruction 36-2601, surveys can only be administered to Air Force members if the survey is limited to the local base and the results of the survey can benefit the Air Force.

The responses to “How satisfied are you with your marriage?” on the pre-retreat survey ranged from one to ten with an average satisfaction level of 7.06 out of 10. This satisfaction level indicated that the marriages were generally healthy before the retreat. The responses on the post-retreat survey ranged from three to ten with an average of 8.38 out of 10. A comparison of the pre- and post-surveys showed an increase in marital satisfaction as a result of the MarriageCare retreat. Increases ranged from 31% to 53% or the total increase possible; with an average post-retreat marital satisfaction increase of 45% of the total increase possible.<sup>2</sup> See Appendix G.

On the post-retreat survey, couples directly evaluated the MarriageCare event by responding to the statement, “This event strengthened my marriage.” One hundred percent of the participants circled “Strongly Agree” or “Agree.” In the ten events tracked for this study, no participant circled “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.”

The “This event strengthened my marriage” response was also used to determine whether or not the MarriageCare retreat increased in effectiveness from 2013 to 2015. In 2013, 40% of responders selected “Strongly Agree” while 60% of responders selected “Agree.” In 2015, 84% of responders selected “Strongly Agree,” while 16% selected “Agree.” Although the average in the satisfaction level did not increase during the two and half years of the study, a higher percentage of participants responded “Strongly Agree” in 2015 than in 2013. This improvement could not be attributed to the materials, format or location, since they remained unchanged. Although the same chaplains facilitated the retreats, it is likely that their confidence and competence increased with experience and further training.

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2. Percent increase was calculated using 100% as the maximum possible increase where every couple reports a 10. In this way, all events can be compared regardless of their pre-event evaluation number.

The effectiveness of the MarriageCare retreat was qualitatively evaluated through comments made by participants, chaplains, and Air Force commanders. The written comments on the post-retreat survey, which are not included in this report because of confidentiality mandates, were extremely positive concerning the format and the retreat curriculum. Suggestions offered in the comments generally focused on wanting different food, recommending more advertisements (so more people would attend), and recommending that the event become Christian-centric.

Another measure of effectiveness was the interest in MarriageCare events. Throughout the two and a half year study, there was a steady demand for the MarriageCare retreats. Each retreat was filled to capacity with a waiting list of 20 to 60 couples. In response to the demand for the retreats and the positive impact they were having on the JBER military population, the 673rd Air Base Wing Commander at JBER provided significantly more funding for retreats in 2015 than in 2013 and 2014.<sup>3</sup>

### **Evaluation of Marriage Care-On Demand Seminar**

The Marriage Care-On Demand seminars were evaluated using the same pre- and post-event surveys as the MarriageCare retreats. The effectiveness of the seminars was also appraised using comments from participants and chaplains, as well as tracking the number of requests received for more marriage seminars.

The pre- and post-event surveys indicated a positive effect for MC-OD. On a scale of one to ten, with one being on the edge of divorce and ten being completely satisfied, the average couple reported a satisfaction level of 7.47 on the pre-seminar

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3. The retreats cost between \$11,000 and \$25,000 each depending on attendance and time of the year.



survey for MC-OD with a range of two to ten. The average post-event satisfaction for the MC-OD seminars was 8.44. The percent increase between the MC-OD pre-event survey and the post-event survey was 38%.<sup>4</sup>

At the conclusion of the MarriageCare-On Demand seminar, couples responded to a second Likert-scale type question. They were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “This event strengthened my marriage” by circling “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” One Hundred percent of participants circled “Strongly Agree” or “Agree,” indicating that the events benefited every couple that attended. No one circled “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” in any of the four one-day seminars. Twenty-one percent of participants circled “Strongly Agree” rather than “Agree” on the first event. Fifty-seven percent circled “Strongly Agree” rather than “Agree” on the final event, a significant improvement.

The chaplains surveyed were also asked to rate how strongly they would recommend a MarriageCare retreat or MC-OD and their perceived effectiveness of MC-OD. Both felt more comfortable recommending the MarriageCare retreat to a couple with a struggling marriage than a MC-OD seminar. However, neither chaplain had seen the survey results of the MC-OD seminars, nor had they taught a MC-OD seminar in the past year.

Couples who attended the lunchtime seminars were not given a survey. The lunchtime events were assessed using verbal feedback given to senior military leaders and chaplains. The feedback was 100% positive. In fact, one senior leader publicly stated on multiple occasions, “This (MC-OD luncheon) event changed my life!”

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4. The percent increase was calculated using 100% as the maximum possible increase where every couple reports a 10. In this way, all events can be compared regardless of their pre-event evaluation number.

### **Recommendations for Future Utilization**

This study clearly showed that MarriageCare programs have a positive effect on military marriages. Since healthy marriages increase work productivity and reduce stress, I recommend that MarriageCare retreats be offered in greater numbers throughout the Air Force.<sup>5</sup>

The Air Force needs effective, low-cost marriage retreats designed to meet the needs of airmen and their spouses. Chaplains should be the ones leading the retreats. This is because of a chaplain's training and experience in public speaking, facilitation, and marriage counseling. It is also because chaplains regularly visit workstations and provide on-the-spot confidential counseling. The visibility afforded by the workplace pastoral visits, coupled with the fact that military members and their spouses almost universally consider chaplains to be both trustworthy and caring, make chaplains the ideal persons for commanders to call upon when marriage and family needs arise in a unit.<sup>6</sup>

Because the MarriageCare retreat program has not been substantially updated since 2008, the Air Force Chaplain Corps should invest the necessary money and resources to add options to the MarriageCare curriculum and expand the library of videos utilized during the retreats. New videos should be field tested to ensure they meet the same quality standards as the videos presently being used. The videos need to introduce the theme or topic of the session in an entertaining way, and they need to appeal to men as well as to women.

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5. Daniel N. Hawkins, and Alan Booth, "Unhappily Ever After: Effects Of Long Term, Low-Quality Marriages On Well-Being." *Social Forces* 84, no. 1 (2005): 456.

6. In a November 2015 JBER survey conducted by the chapel team, 98% of 548 people surveyed believed chaplains are trustworthy, and 99% of people surveyed believed chaplains are caring.

Two of the videos used in the MarriageCare retreat were also used for MC-OD. For MC-OD, I recommend that the Air Force research and obtain permission to use new videos to meet the shorter timeframe of a luncheon seminar.

This study has shown that MC-OD seminars are effective and desired by military commanders. It has also shown that the timeframe and format should be adjusted. I believe all four sessions of MC-OD should be offered in separate but consecutive lunchtime seminars. The seminars could be offered once a month for different units throughout the base. Because all four sessions would be offered, the cost of an MC-OD seminar would quadruple to approximately \$600, but it would be still be less than 1/23rd the average cost of a MarriageCare retreat (\$14,000). It would also involve more people. By offering one lunchtime MC-OD seminar per month for four consecutive months, attendance and unit impact would be maximized.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The Air Force should continue to collect data from MarriageCare retreats and make appropriate adjustments to improve the program. Collecting data from MC-OD lunch seminars will continue to be challenging. Couples who attend a one-hour session do not have time to practice the information in order to know whether or not the material actually strengthens their marriage. To obtain the full effect of the MC-OD program, couples should experience all four modules. I recommend that MC-OD lunch seminars be evaluated using a pretest before the first event and a posttest after the fourth event. The evaluations could be completed online to protect confidentiality, or a third party could collect them.

Air Force women married to civilian men have the highest divorce rates in the military.<sup>7</sup> I recommend that a separate marriage retreat be available just for that demographic. In addition to addressing the specific needs of a highly-vulnerable population, a marriage retreat for Air Force women married to civilian men could add another dimension to evaluating the effectiveness of the MarriageCare program.

The long-term effectiveness of the JBER Marriage Care program needs to be examined. My research showed that couples believe their marriages benefited from the program. True effectiveness, however, can only be determined by a long-term study. There will be challenges in a long-term study since military people tend to move at least every three to four years. Once a military member moves to a new base, it may be difficult if not impossible to survey the couple.

A common critique levied against MarriageCare retreats is that they are not uniquely Christian. MarriageCare retreats were deliberately designed to be multi-faith to allow chaplains of all faiths to lead the retreats and airmen of all faiths to benefit from them. Requests for a uniquely Christian version of the retreat have been rejected in the past because there are already a large number of Christian retreats available. However, the format and theory of MarriageCare and MC-OD have been so successful that it may be beneficial to develop a distinctively Christian program. The Christian program could then be tested to evaluate its effectiveness, usefulness, and demand.

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7. Researched at the USAF Chaplain Corps College using divorce statistics provided by the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, A-1.

## **Conclusion**

Despite its limited application, the JBER Marriage Care program shows tremendous promise. In March of 2015, the Vice Commander of the 673 ABW at JBER met with the JBER chaplain team to discuss the way ahead for their programs. He shared that he had noticed a base-wide decrease in the number of domestic violence and marital incidents, and he attributed much of this trend to the work of the chapel team and the JBER Marriage Care program. He strongly encouraged the chapel team to continue their efforts of caring for military marriages.

USAF chapel teams should offer MarriageCare retreats to the greatest extent possible and complement them with regular marriage counseling training for Air Force chaplains. MC-OD should be further refined and tested to evaluate its effectiveness as a lunchtime program. I would like to see MC-OD be implemented Air Force-wide.

Although the study has ended, the JBER Marriage Care program continues. As of December 2015, three MC-OD events have been requested by military commanders and scheduled for early 2016. There are 40 couples on a waiting list for the next MarriageCare retreat.

## Appendix A

### MARRIAGE CARE-ON DEMAND CHECKLIST

TASK	DATE COMPLETED
Pre-Event Planning	
Determine if squadron specific or open to all	
Select venue	
Determine number of couples based on venue	
If deposit required, submit funds request	
Advertise and sign-up couples ( <i>work with CCs and First Sergeants</i> )	
Get estimate on lunch/snacks	
Submit funds request for lunch/snacks	
Review intake forms ( <i>if same-gender couple registers, notify HC leadership</i> )	
Notify couples of selection and provide directions to venue	
Determine facilitators and assign sessions	
Reserve Army Chapel projector if needed	

TASK	DATE COMPLETED
1 Week Prior to Event	
Send reminder email to couples selected to attend	
Check laptop computer for slides/videos	
Check HC portable projector ( <i>if using</i> )	
Locate/set-aside computer cords and extension cords	
Locate/set-aside 2 easels	
Locate/set-aside 4 big markers	
Locate/set-aside 2 big flip charts	
Locate/set-aside screen ( <i>if needed</i> )	
Make copies of handouts ( <i>1 per individual</i> )	

TASK	DATE
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1 Week Prior to Event	DATE COMPLETED
Gather other supplies ( <i>rope, tape, balls, etc.</i> )	
Re-confirm venue	
Arrange for lunch/snacks ( <i>pick up funds if required</i> )	

TASK	DATE COMPLETED
1 Day Before Event	
Pick up key to venue if necessary	
Pick up Army Chapel projector ( <i>if using</i> )	
Pick up food/snacks ( <i>as necessary</i> )	
Check media	

TASK	DATE COMPLETED
Day of Event	
Pick up remaining food/snacks ( <i>as necessary</i> )	
Arrive NLT 1 hour before scheduled start time	
Set up room	
Put out snacks	
Check media	

TASK	DATE COMPLETED
End of Event	
Breakdown room	
Clean up ( <i>vacuum, remove trash, etc.</i> )	
Return key ( <i>if required</i> )	
Review/score surveys and feedback	
Complete AAR	

APPENDIX B  
Welcome E-mail

Congratulations! This is to confirm your slot for our MarriageCare Retreat at the Hotel Alyeska in Girdwood, AK \_\_\_\_\_. The Alyeska Resort is a one-hour drive south on the Seward Highway. You will be given a welcome letter and additional information when you check in. As a reminder, all meals and lodging are provided at no cost to you.

If have any questions or need additional information, please don't hesitate to call our MarriageCare Team, \_\_\_\_\_ or Chaplain \_\_\_\_\_ (at JROC, 552-5762). We have planned a wonderful weekend for you and your spouse. It will begin at 1800 on Friday and end at 1200 Sunday. There will be great accommodations, amazing indoor and outdoor amenities, fantastic meals, and four inspiring 1-hour sessions that will help you grow closer to your spouse.

Please keep the following in mind:

1. MarriageCare is an USAF Chaplain Corps sponsored program open to all married military couples regardless of age, religion or gender. The focus of your weekend will be on your marriage, but please be respectful of all attendees. If you have any concerns about this please give me a call at 552-5762.
2. If you need to cancel your plans to attend, please let us know ASAP via email and/or telephone. Email is preferable. This is extremely important as we do have a number of people on our waiting list. Additionally, please be available for the entire retreat.

Thank you for making plans to join us on a beautiful Alyeska weekend. You will never regret investing your time in MarriageCare!

For additional information on the hotel, please see the link below.

<http://www.alyeskaresort.com/>

Very Respectfully,

Chaplain Richardson  
STEVEN RICHARDSON, Ch, Maj, USAF

## APPENDIX C

### Family Rules Handout

**Write the general patterns your family had when you were between 0-18. If you had more than one family, or no family, write the general patterns of behavior that stick out to you the most during that time period.**

#### **1. Relax/revitalize**

How did people in your family recover from a long day or a long week? What helped you/your family revitalize?

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#### **2. Forgiveness**

How did you learn forgiveness? Have you ever really felt forgiven? Have you been able to forgive your parents for not being perfect?

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#### **3. Religious education/practices**

What education did you receive about religion? What were the attitudes and actions regarding religious beliefs?

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#### **4. Sex/Infidelity**

What was considered cheating on a loved one when you were growing up? Was it something that your family talked about, or was it a taboo subject? Did "cheating" necessarily involve sex?

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#### **5. Conflict/fights**

How did your parents/guardians fight? Were there any rules? Was yelling normal?

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#### **6. Self-image/Self-Esteem**

Did your family member's insecurities determine their identity? Were they better at encouraging one another, or tearing down one another?

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#### **7. Parenting (discipline, time)**

Who disciplined you when you were a child or teenager? How? Who spent time with you or rewarded you? How?

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#### **8. Work**

What was your family work ethic? Did you live up to it?

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#### **9. Debt/Saving/Spending**

Was it normal for your family to be in debt? Who spent the money? Was money something your family argued about?

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#### **10. Deploying to a war zone**

Was war ever talked about when you were growing up? Have you discussed how to keep your marriage and family strong during military deployments?

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## APPENDIX D

### Marriage Care-On Demand Seminar

**(TASK) Room set up:**

- Round tables, 6 to 8 chairs per table.
- Enough 48-inch sections of rope with a knot in the middle (1 per couple).
- A selection from the marriage video by Jeff Allen will be playing as people enter (used by permission).

***Begin once everyone has arrived, but no later than four minutes after the scheduled start time.***

**(E):** Welcome to this faith-based, non-exclusive marriage enrichment seminar.

**(E):** Although we might be experts in leading MarriageCare seminars, and we have a lot of training in marriage counseling, we are not the experts in your marriage. You and God are the experts in your marriage. We are here to provide you with some additional tools to strengthen your relationship.

**(E):** Our goal is to help you discover healthy attitudes, actions and values that will improve your marriage. Our prayer is that you have fun, bond as a couple and practice even healthier actions for your marriage and your family by the end of this seminar. We will not try to “teach you,” as though we were the experts in your marriage. We simply want to help you improve your marriage.

**(Question)** How many of you exchanged vows during your wedding ceremony? What did you vow?

- Wedding vows are a common tradition in America. Most of us included vows in our wedding ceremonies, but we may not have given the vows much thought.
- Most TV and movie weddings include some variation of the traditional vow. You may have used them as well. (Project the traditional vows on the screen)
- In MarriageCare, we use the traditional vows as a platform to help couples grow a stronger, more vibrant, marriage.

**(E):** In this seminar, we will take an in-depth look at the first three words, “I take thee.” - They may seem simple, but the message is powerful.

**(Question)** Can anyone tell me what “I take thee” means?

## SESSION 1: TWO FAMILIES

Lesson Objective: Help couples understand their differences based on their history

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ogyh7el93EY>

If you have attended a MarriageCare retreat in the past, the concept of **family rules** will be familiar to you. In this seminar, we are going to dig a little deeper than we did at the retreat.

### Introduction to Family Rules

**(TASK): Family Rules Handout / 7 minutes** - We gave each of you a Family Rules handout. I'm going to ask you to write on the handout the unspoken rules your family practiced in these areas when you were growing up. You may have grown up in more than one family. If so, just write about the rules that stand out the most. As we go down the list, I will explain a little more. **(Explain each rule in 30 seconds or less, including an example of how one of the rules in your family of origin was completely different than the rule in your spouse's family.)** If you still have questions, just raise your hand and I can explain it further.

(Couples have 10 minutes to fill out the handout; it is not a problem if they don't finish.)

**(TASK):** Now share one of your family rules with the people at your table. You can share any rule you want. I simply ask that not everyone share the same rule and that you continue sharing until I stop you. **(Allow tables to share for 10 minutes.)**

**(E:)** Good or bad, these rules are part of the "I take thee." They were passed down to you though the actions of your parents, family members or friends. They were not necessarily the ones that were spoken. They were the rules that were practiced. Our actions, not our words, are the true family rules.

For example:

- Your parents may have said, "Don't speed," but if they always drove ten miles over the speed limit, that was the rule.
- Your parents may have said, "Eat healthy," but if they always ate junk food, that was the rule.

**Introduce the "Knee to Knee & Eye to Eye" communication technique and the rope** (Set up two chairs facing each other in the front of the room. Invite your spouse or co-presenter to demonstrate the technique with you. Sit knee to knee and look into each other's eyes as you talk.)

### Family Rules Handout

**(TASK): Knee to Knee** - Using this technique, go down the list of family rules and discuss the rules your family practiced.

- As you sit knee to knee, I also want you to use the rope. If you believe the rule in your family was similar to the rule of your spouse's family, place your hands closer to the knot. If you feel your rule was different, move your hand further away from the knot.

### **LESSON:**

When I said, "I take thee," I was vowing to take my spouse's family history, good and bad, because the actions of my spouse's family are a part of who he or she is.

Some of the rules you talked about were healthy, and some were not. Some may have been healthy and appropriate for your family when you were growing up, but they would not be good at all for your present family.

**(Question)** What do people do if they have inherited an unhealthy family rule? *(They usually accept it or do just the opposite. Their "new rule" is then passed on to the next generation.)*

**(E):** My favorite book, the Bible, talks about family rules. Specifically, it talks about generational blessings and generational curses. For instance, if someone does good and lives a good life, they pass down those rules as a blessing to their descendants from generation to generation. Conversely, if someone lies, cheats, steals etc., they pass along lying, cheating and stealing to the next generation-- and it becomes a generational curse. If we have inherited a negative habit or lifestyle from our ancestors, can we still pass down a blessing (a good habit or lifestyle) to our children? Of course! (But it requires a deliberate, conscious decision to do so -- and a change in lifestyle.)

*(Facilitator should give an example from his or her or spouse's family history - make sure the facilitator is not the hero of the story.)*

The actions you practice in your home will be passed down to those who follow you (children, grandchildren, friends, family members).

In session 2 we will help you choose what actions you want to pass along.

Before we take a break, I want to read a vow from a young woman named Ruth. We are going to look at this vow throughout the day. **Read Ruth 1:16.** (Do not explain it yet.)

## **SESSION 2: TWO PEOPLE**

**Session Objective: Help couples choose what rules and values they want to pass down to others.**

**(E):** I'm going to show you a video that presents an issue some of you may agree with and others may strongly disagree with. Whether you agree or disagree doesn't really matter. The key is to think about what influences you as you choose your own beliefs. What beliefs can you live with? By the way, he is trying to be funny. It is OK to laugh.

**Video:** Muslim Imam justifying lying to a spouse about dinner.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dm0HtX90Vw>

**(Question):** So how do we decide what rules are healthy for us as a couple and as a family?

**(TASK-Activity):** Throw a bucket of footballs and basketballs on the floor. Spouses are on opposite sides. One spouse is blindfolded and must not talk. He/she must walk across the floor to find his or her spouse. The “seeing” spouse verbally guides the blindfolded one across the room avoiding the balls. (Ask for four or five couples to participate. Spouses do not have to play both roles; let husbands and wives choose whether they want to be the blindfolded spouse or the leader.)

**(Group Question)**

- Did you see frustration? Did you see innovation? What could have been done differently?
- The individuals had to filter out every other voice and just focus on their spouse's voice.
- What are some “voices” that call us to follow their rules for living? **(Possible answers: family, friends, news, TV, celebrities, religious bodies, military, counselors, etc.)** - **Some of the voices are actually inside of us, and we don't know where they come from. That doesn't mean they are good for us.** Some of these voices are helpful; others are not. The goal is decide as a couple how you want to live and what is important to you—to decide which voices you will listen to and which you will ignore.

**(TASK): Knee to Knee (questions are on the screen)**

- “What one family rule did you have growing up that you want to pass down to those who follow you (children, grandchildren, friends, family members)?”
- “What one family rule did you have growing up that you would NOT want to pass down to those who follow you (children, grandchildren, friends, family members)?”

**(TASK):** Next, I would like you to take your handout, and prioritize the importance of the family rule categories (not your parents’ rule) on a scale of 1 to 10. If you want, you can include a rule not listed on the paper.

**(TASK): Knee to Knee**

Pick the top two family rules on each of your lists. Knee-to-knee, using the rope, act out how close you feel to each other in each of these areas. (5 minutes)

»» One of the goals of this seminar is to help you get closer on the rope either by developing a shared family rule you can both agree on, or by developing respect for the other person's rule.

**(TASK): Knee to Knee discussion (7 minutes)**

Discuss an action you could take this week to get closer to one another in one of these family rule categories by developing a shared family rule or by respecting each other's differences.

**(TASK): As a group, define “Sacred.”**

- Read Webster’s dictionary definition: “Devoted exclusively to one service or use, worthy of religious veneration.”

Give an illustration of how my need could violate something my spouse considers sacred. (Example: My need to watch football on Sunday morning could violate my spouses view that going to church as a family is sacred.)

**(TASK): Knee to knee (7 minutes -- questions on screen)**

- What do you consider sacred in your marriage?
- What can you do, or want to do, to make your marriage more sacred?

Thus far, you have discussed as a couple rules you want to keep, a prioritization of those rules, and actions you will take to get closer to one another.

**Read Ruth 1:16 again to the couples.**

**(TASK): Knee to Knee:** “If you were to make a vow like this to your spouse, which of his or her rules, priorities, or actions would you incorporate in your vow?”

### SESSION 3: ONE PATH

Session Objective: Help couples identify ways to draw closer and eliminate barriers to closeness through healthy communication.

**Video:** “*Laughing Your Way to a Better Marriage*” clip (6 minutes - used by permission)

**(TASK):** Separate the men from the women. Have both groups list BOTH the top five needs of men and the top five needs of women. Let them know that you are asking them to be a little stereotypical. This is just to get us thinking for the next step in “I Take Thee.” You can have multiple groups, but each group should have at least seven and no more than 15 people. Reconvene and report the results.

**(E):** Both groups did a good job of guessing the other group’s needs, so why do we sometimes fail to meet these needs?

- **Lack of understanding** (You may have said it repeatedly, but your spouse never fully understood what to do or how important it is.
- **Something else is more urgent** (kids, military, rest).
- **Selfishness** (We can all be selfish – sometimes even chaplains!)
- **Violation of something you (or I) consider “sacred.”**
- **Communication about what they really mean to me.**

Teach communication lessons using “I-statements” and a pattern: “When \_\_\_\_ I feel \_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. I want (would like, request) \_\_\_\_\_.” (On screen)  
 (The next slide has a list of feeling words.)  
 - “I statements” can be used to praise or share concerns.

**(TASK): Knee to Knee**

Share what you believe are two of your top needs, and then, using an “I statement,” share your answer to this question: “What has your spouse done in the past to meet one of your needs?” (Facilitator should give an example)

**(E): *We can also share a problem that we simply cannot work around using I-Statements.***

**(E): *We all have conflict. Most conflicts can be resolved easily, but there are times we cannot easily find a solution, so we argue. These conflicts become barriers to closeness, to "I Take Thee."***

*We are going to look at a simple way to resolve conflict in a marriage.*

**STATE THE PROBLEM**

-- Clearly and calmly state the problem using “I” statements -- Refrain from judging, accusing, or blaming.

**USE REFLECTIVE LISTENING (mirroring)**

-- Verbalize the emotion and content from your spouse’s statement -- Repeat until understanding is acknowledged.

**BRAINSTORM POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

-- List ALL possible solutions to resolve the conflict.

**CHOOSE A SOLUTION**

-- Choose a solution you both agree on.

*The goal cannot be to win. Winning in a marriage can be incredibly dangerous. In a marriage the two have become one flesh. If I win in a disagreement, I get 100% and my wife gets 0%. Our marriage gets a 50% which is a failing grade. We should shoot to respect each other’s opinion and find an answer we can both agree on. That means we have to sacrifice some of our right answer to achieve something more important, connection. (Share an example)*

**(TASK): Knee to Knee**

Practice the four-step process with a made-up problem or a simple issue. This is not the place to get into an argument you have been having for months.

When I said, “I take thee,” I made a sacred vow to be united to one person “until death do us part.”

**Read Ruth again...**

**(TASK): Knee to Knee (4 minute discussion)**

If you were to make a vow like this to your spouse, what needs would you vow to meet, and what actions would you vow to take in your communication?

## **SESSION 4: “One Future”**

***Session Objective:*** To help couples choose the best future actions for their marriage.

***Video:*** “The Big News” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11leTX5YSbE>

**(E): In the video, their marriage has to fall somewhere in between the two ideals of the engaged couple.**

- Idealized expectations like the ones in the video, a “should” or “should not,” often lead to ANGER.

**(Question)** How do thriving military marriages deal with obstacles and expectations – work, moving, deployments, constant competition?

**(Question)** What actions lead to a thriving military marriage? (Small groups - 5 minutes, then each group reports to the entire group.)

**(E): If these actions help a marriage thrive, what actions do you think hurt a marriage the most?**

Researcher John Gottman talks about the “**Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.**” (On screen)

- Criticism
- Contempt
- Defensiveness
- Stonewalling

**(TASK)** – Ask the group to define what these might mean (**3 minutes**).

**(TASK)** - Ask the small groups to try to come up with the **opposite** of these four horsemen as goals. How could marriage partners protect themselves against the horsemen? (Possible answers below...)

- »» Praise the positive »» Show respect
- »» Develop boundaries »» Forgive failures

**(E): Part of the key for overcoming stonewalling and defensiveness has to be FORGIVENESS.**

***Have small groups define forgiveness***

**(E): Teach Gary Chapman's apology languages - (Used by permission)**

**(TASK) Knee to Knee**

- What are your two primary apology languages?
- Develop one agreed-upon hope, one agreed-upon dream, one agreed-upon tradition, and one agreed-upon sacred belief.
- Based on these, re-write Ruth 1:16.
- Recite your rewrite of Ruth 1:16 to one another.



APPENDIX E

## **Marriage Care Program Feedback Form**

(Circle your response below)

**1. This event strengthened our relationship.**

Strongly Agree

Agree

Slightly Agree

Slightly Disagree

Disagree

**2. On a scale of 1 to 10, with "1" being ready to divorce and "10" being completely satisfied, how satisfied are you with your marriage?**

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

**3. Do you have any suggestions for the chapel staff to improve future events?**

**4. What was the most beneficial part of this event?**

## APPENDIX F

<b>Chaplain Training Survey Results</b> <b>(On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the least, 5 being the most)</b>		
<b>Question</b>	<b>Chaplain 1</b>	<b>Chaplain 2</b>
On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your confidence in marriage counseling before and after the training.	Before = 3.0 After = 4.5	Before = 4.0 After = 4.5
On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your competence in marriage counseling before and after the training.	Before = 3.0 After = 4.5	Before = 4.0 After = 4.5
On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the effectiveness of the MarriageCare-On Demand seminar.	Rate of effectiveness = 3	Rate of effectiveness = 3.5
Rate how comfortable you would be recommending the Marriage Care-On Demand seminar to a couple with a struggling marriage.	Rate of being comfortable recommending = 4	Rate of being comfortable recommending = 4
Rate how comfortable you would be recommending the MarriageCare retreat to a couple with a struggling marriage.	Rate of being comfortable recommending = 5	Rate of being comfortable recommending = 5
Share what you believe is the strength of the Marriage Care -On Demand seminar.	Strength: As long as the word travels that such a program exists to any/all units, much of the detail is at the discretion of Leadership. Locality of seminar is convenient for full-time moms and dads and all military. Short and brief seminars respects the time of all personnel.	Strength: Getting busy couples together during the workday to get practical skills that can be applied at little/to no cost to them.
- Share what you believe to be the weaknesses of the Marriage Care On-Demand seminar.	Weakness: none listed...	Weakness: Couples of the same work section coming together. This may prevent a deeper level of vulnerability.

<p>How can the counseling training be improved?</p>	<p>Have regular practice sessions, dry runs, and round table discussions on how the content can be improved, made more clear, or brought up to date where necessary. Our culture is changing and our facilitators are getting older. There exists the potential for culture clash in delivery, presentation skills, humor, and the like.</p>	<p>Possibly consider more time in applying the skills we're teaching as compared to having more sessions. I believe the couples will truly know (benefit from) the material as they create muscle memory in applying skills.</p>
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## APPENDIX G MARRIAGECARE DATA

Date	Number of Couples	Pre-event average (from survey)	Post-event average (from survey)	Average percent increase from pre- to post-surveys <sup>1</sup>	Strongly agree <sup>2</sup>	Agree <sup>3</sup>	Disagree <sup>4</sup>	Strongly Disagree <sup>5</sup>
2013, 16-18 Aug	13	6.62	8.42	53%	10	16	0	0
2013, 20-22 Sept	32	No data available <sup>6</sup>	No data available	No data available	25	37	0	0
2014, 19-21 Sept	41	6.66	7.95	39%	42	19	0	0
2015, 13-15 Feb	27	7.8	8.7	41%	44	4	0	0
2015, 27-29 Mar	37	7.22	8.45	44%	52	14	0	0
2015, 29-31 May	20	7.56	8.56	41%	25	4	0	0
2015, 4-6 Sept	20	7.72	8.91	52%	28	6	0	0
2015, 18-20 Sept	20	6.45	8.26	51%	28	4	0	0
2015, 13-15 Nov	20	6.88	7.86	31%	30	5	0	0
2015, 20-22 Nov	20	6.6	8.3	50%	28	7	0	0
Average	26	7.06	8.38	.45%	31.2	11.6	0	0

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1. Of the total possible increase with a maximum of ten.

2. Number of participants who “strongly agreed” with the statement “This event strengthened my marriage,” on the post-event survey.

3. Number of participants who “agreed” with the statement “This event strengthened my marriage,” on the post-event survey.

4. Number of participants who “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement “This event strengthened my marriage,” on the post-event survey.

5. Number of participants who “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement “This event strengthened my marriage,” on the post-event survey.

173. Second page of USAF After Action Report containing results of pre and post-test was lost.

## MARRIAGE CARE-ON DEMAND DATA

Date	Number of Couples	Pre-event average (from survey)	Post-event average (from survey)	Average percent increase from pre- to post-surveys	Strongly agree <sup>7</sup>	Agree <sup>8</sup>	Disagree <sup>9</sup>	Strongly Disagree <sup>10</sup>
2014, 21 Mar	16	6.41	7.83	40%	5	19	0	0
2014, 9 May	11	8.0	8.9	45%	4	12	0	0
2015, 9 Jan	11	8.0	8.6	30%	8	6	0	0
2015, 27 Feb	7	No data available <sup>11</sup>	No data available	No data available	8	6	0	0
2015, 20 Mar	16	N/A (Lunch) <sup>12</sup>	N/A (Lunch)	N/A (Lunch)	N/A (Lunch)	N/A (Lunch)	N/A (Lunch)	N/A (Lunch)
2015, 4 Dec	20	N/A (Lunch) <sup>13</sup>	N/A (Lunch)	N/A (Lunch)	N/A (Lunch)	N/A (Lunch)	N/A (Lunch)	N/A (Lunch)
Average	13.7	7.47	8.44	38%	6.25	10.75	0	0

7. Number of participants who “strongly agreed” with the statement “This event strengthened my relationship,” on the post-event survey.

8. Number of participants who “agreed” with the statement “This event strengthened my relationship,” on the post-event survey.

9. Number of participants who “disagreed” with the statement “This event strengthened my relationship,” on the post-event survey.

10. Number of participants who “strongly disagreed” with the statement “This event strengthened my relationship,” on the post-event survey.

11. Second page of After Action Report containing results of pre and post-test was lost.

12. Only narrative feedback was collected on 20 Mar 2015. All feedback is below:

- **What could we do as MC-OD facilitators to improve these events (e.g. luncheons)?**

-- My wife suggested more vegetables with the lunch...that's about the only criticism I have.

- **What do you think went well?**

-- I thought it was a very fun event and it was a good refresher for developing communication between spouses.

-- The video at the beginning set a good precedent for discussing a serious topic while keeping the atmosphere light and cordial.

-- I planned to only stay a few minutes. It was so good I stayed for the whole thing. (Commander)

13. Only verbal feedback was collected. All was positive with the standout comment coming from a senior enlisted leader who said, “This event changed my life. I already know it.”

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